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The old dark house.

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THE OLD DARK HOUSE

BY

J. B. PRIESTLEY

. . . . *the bright day is done,*
And we are for the dark . . . .

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK *and* LONDON
MCMXXVIII

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THE OLD DARK HOUSE

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

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First Printing, January, 1928
Second Printing, January, 1928
Third Printing, January, 1928
Fourth Printing, February, 1928
Fifth Printing, February, 1928
Sixth Printing, February, 1928
Seventh Printing, February, 1928
Eighth Printing, March, 1928
Ninth Printing, March, 1928

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Chapter One

MARGARET was saying something, but he couldn't hear a word. The downpour and the noise of the engine were almost deafening. Suddenly he stopped the car and leaned back, relieved, relaxed, free for a moment from the task of steering a way through the roaring darkness. He had always felt insecure driving at night, staring out at a little lighted patch of road and groping for levers and switches, pressing pedals; had always been rather surprised when the right thing happened. But to-night, on these twisting mountain roads, some of them already awash, with storm after storm bursting upon them, and the whole night now one black torrent, every mile was a miracle. It couldn't last. Their rattling little box of mechanical tricks was nothing but a piece of impudence. He turned to Margaret.

'You needn't have done that,' she was saying now. She had had to raise her voice, of course, but it was as cool and clear as ever. She was still detached, but apparently, for once, not amused.

'Done what?' Philip returned, but his heart

sank, for he knew what she meant. Then he felt annoyed. Couldn't he stop the damned thing for a minute? He was easily the coldest and wettest of the three of them.

'You needn't have stopped the car,' Margaret replied. 'I was only saying that we ought to have turned back before. It's simply idiotic going on like this. Where are we?'

He felt an icy trickle going down his back and shook himself. 'Hanged if I know,' he told her. 'Somewhere in wildest Wales. That's as near as I can get. I've never found my bearings since we missed that turning. But I think the direction's vaguely right.' He wriggled a little. He was even wetter than he had imagined. He had got wet when he had gone out to change the wheel and then later when she had stopped and he had had to look at the engine, and since then the rain had been coming in steadily. Not all the hoods and screens in the world could keep out this appalling downpour.

'This is hopeless.' Margaret was calmly condemning the situation. 'What time is it?'

There was no light on the dashboard, so he struck a match and held it near the clock. Half-past nine. There was just time to catch a glimpse of Margaret's profile before the tiny flame vanished. It was like overhearing a faintly scornful

phrase about himself. He suddenly felt responsible for the whole situation, not only for the delay on the road and the missed turning, but for the savage hills and the black spouting night. Once again he saw himself fussing away, nervous, incompetent, slightly disordered, while she looked on, critical, detached, indulgent or contemptuous. When anything went wrong—and it was in the nature of things to go wrong—she always made him feel like that. Perhaps all wives did. It wasn't fair. It was taking a mean advantage of the fact that you cared what they thought, for once you stopped caring the trick must fail.

'We'd better go on and try and arrive somewhere,' Margaret was saying. 'Shall I drive now?' He was expecting that. She always imagined that she was the better driver. And perhaps she was, though. Not really so skilful with the wheel, the gears, the brakes, but far cooler than he was simply because she never saw the risks. Her imagination didn't take sudden leaps, didn't see a shattered spine a finger's breadth away, didn't realise that we all went capering along a razor-edge. Unlike him, she blandly trusted everything, everything, that is, except human beings. Now *they* were not so bad, merely stupid—the thought came flashing as he shifted his position—it was only the outside things that were so devilish.

'No, thanks, I'll keep on. There's no point in changing now. We'll arrive somewhere soon.' He was about to reach out to the switch when the light of a match at the back turned him round. Penderel, who had been dozing there for the last two hours, was now lighting a cigarette. 'Hello,' he shouted back. 'You all right, Penderel? Not drowned yet?' Penderel's face, queerly illuminated, looked at once drawn and impish. A queer stick!—mad as a hatter some people thought Margaret among them; but Philip wasn't sure. He suddenly felt glad to see him there. Penderel wouldn't mind all this.

Penderel blew out smoke, held up the lighted match, and leaned forward, as vivid as a newly painted portrait. He grinned. 'Where are we? Then the match went out and he was nothing but a shadow.

'We don't know,' Philip shouted back above the drumming rain. 'We've missed the way. We're somewhere in the Welsh mountains and it's half past nine. Sorry.'

'Don't mention it.' Penderel seemed to be amused. 'I say, this storm's going on for ever. I believe it's the end of the world. They've overheard the talk at the Ainsleys', and have decided to blot us all out. What do you think?'

Philip felt Margaret stirring beside him. He

knew that her body was stiffening with disapproval, partly because the Ainsleys, with whom they had all three been staying, were old friends of hers, but chiefly because she didn't like Penderel, whose existence she had almost forgotten, and was only too ready to disapprove of everything he said or did. 'We shan't see even Shrewsbury to-night,' Philip shouted back. A halt at Shrewsbury had been their modified plan, following upon their delay on the road and their slow progress in the torrential rain.

'Shrewsbury!' Penderel laughed. 'Nor the Hesperides either. We'll be lucky if we get anywhere, but of this. I'll tell you what'—he hesitated a moment—'I don't want to frighten Mrs. Waverton ——'

'Go on, Mr. Penderel.' Margaret was icy. 'I'm not easily frightened.'

'Aren't you? I am,' Penderel replied, loudly and cheerfully. He seemed to be for ever putting his foot in it, either didn't know or didn't care. 'I was thinking that you'll have to be careful here. We've had a week's heavy rain, and thunderstorms for the last two days, and in this part of the world they're always having landslides and whatnot. Don't be surprised to find yourself driving into the middle of a lake, or the whole

hillside coming down on you, or the road disappearing under the front wheels.'

The noise and the darkness made snubbing difficult, but Margaret did what she could. 'I must say I should be very surprised indeed,' she threw back. 'Hurry on, Philip. Open the windscreen. We can't be any wetter than we are now and I want to look out for any turnings or signposts.'

'Not that I care, you know,' Penderel called out. 'I don't want to go to Shrewsbury. I don't particularly want to go anywhere. Something might happen here, and nothing ever happens in Shrewsbury, and nothing much on the other side of Shrewsbury. But here there's always a chance.'

As Philip started the car again he wished himself a hundred miles the other side of Shrewsbury, moving sedately down some sensible main road towards a fire and clean sheets. The road they were on now seemed little better than a track, twisting its way along the hillside. There were no lights to be seen, nothing but the flashing rain and the jumping scrap of lighted road ahead, full of deep ruts and stones and shining with water. He moved cautiously forward, shaking the raindrops from his eyes and gripping the wheel as hard as he could. This ring of metal seemed his only hold upon security now that everything was black and sliding and treacherous, and even then it rattled uselessly

in his hand at times. One silly twist and they were bogged for the night or even over the edge. Earlier it had been rather exhilarating rushing through this savagery of earth and weather, but now he felt tired and apprehensive. Penderel had been exaggerating, of course, perhaps trying to frighten Margaret. But no, he wouldn't be doing that, though he probably knew that she didn't like him and was against his returning from the Ainsleys' with them. He exaggerated for his own good pleasure, being a wild youth who liked to see life as either a screaming buffoonery or a grand catastrophe, something Elizabethan in five acts. Yet there were landslides after heavy rain in this part of the world. There might be floods too. Philip saw them stuck somewhere on this hillside all night. And what a night too! He shivered and involuntarily pressed the accelerator.

The car roared forward, and though he immediately released the pressure it did not slacken speed because there was a sudden dip in the road. Just in front the hillside jutted into a sharp edge of rock and the road turned a blind corner. Philip had only time to touch the footbrake when this corner swung towards him. He gave the wheel a hard twist; for a second the car went sliding; and the next moment they were round the corner but apparently plunging into a river. The road had disappeared; there was

nothing ahead but the gleam of water. In they went with a roar and a splash. Philip gripped the wheel harder than ever; he felt Margaret's hand upon his left arm; he heard a shout from Penderel behind. Then the roaring and splashing filled the night, but the car seemed to be slowing down. He accelerated and the engine responded with loud spasmodic bursts, but all to no purpose. The car swung forward, stopped, drummed, and then shook violently, swung forward again, then stopped.

'Don't stop.' Margaret was crying in his ear.

'Can't help it,' he shouted. What a damn silly remark! Did she think they were in a motor-boat! He must do something though. The engine was still running, trembling there under his feet, like a hunted beast. Hastily he shoved the lever into low gear and rammed down the accelerator. The car gave an agonised roar and seemed to shake itself like a dog, but for a moment or so nothing else happened. 'Here for the night, here for the night,' Philip heard himself chanting idiotically. Then slowly, almost painfully it seemed, the car moved forward, protesting every yard against the unfamiliar element. And now the road began to climb again; the worst was passed; the lights showed solid ground ahead, and a few minutes' more splashing brought them out into earth and air. The little box of tricks had won. At least,

Philip reminded himself, it had won so far; end of first round. But what was coming next? They were still climbing a little, and now the hillside to the right seemed less steep and rocky, but that to the left fell away more sharply. He could see nothing there but rain falling into a black gulf. It had the curiously vivid and dramati quality of rain in a film.

Margaret was saying something and appeared to be fumbling in the pocket in the door. What was it she wanted? He caught the word 'stop' in her reply, and so once again brought the car to a standstill. 'What is it?' he asked.

'I'm looking for the map,' she replied. 'We must find out where we are. We can't go on like this.'

'A good voyage, Waverton!' Penderel shouted. 'Have a cigarette?' Philip found the open case under his nose when he turned, and lit up with Penderel. Then there was a little click and the whole car was illuminated, transformed into a queer tiny room. The night was banished, wind and rain and darkness disappearing behind the shining screen; Margaret had found the little observation lamp and had fixed it in the plug. She had also found the map and was now bending over it, the lamp in her hand. But it was only a flimsy affair of paper and the rain had played havoc with

it. Philip, who was visited by a sudden feeling of cosiness, watched her turn it over and stare at it with wide grave eyes. Then he saw her shake her head; just like a child, he thought. He wanted to tell her so and give her a quick little hug, a sign across a thousand miles of desert; then rush away to the nearest shelter and talk everything out with her. What was she feeling? How odd it was that he didn't know!

'You look,' she said, holding out the map. 'I can't see anything. It's all a stupid puddle.'

He peered at the thing just to satisfy her. Roads and rivers and stout acres were now so many blotches. 'It seems to me it represents this country very well, for everything here's under water. The thing's useless. Besides, I can't make out where we missed the turning.' He followed a possible road with his forefinger, only to discover that it led him into a long blue smudge, under which some fifty square miles were submerged. Perhaps if they went there, everything would be different. Perhaps they were there. 'I give it up,' he told her. Then he turned to see Penderel's tousled hair and bright eyes above the back of the seat. 'Would you like to look at the map, Penderel? We can't make anything of it.'

Penderel grinned and shook his head. 'No map for me. I don't believe we're on a map. Drive

on and we'll arrive somewhere. Only don't let it be water. We be land rats.'

Margaret made a slight gesture of impatience. 'It's absurd now trying to get to any particular place. We must stop at the first village we come to and ask for shelter. What's that?' There came a crack of thunder that rolled and clanged among the hills. Philip opened the door on his side, threw away his cigarette, looked out at the thick jigging wires of rain, and then hastily closed the door. 'More rain and thunder,' he said, then looked doubtfully at Margaret. 'We'd better move on and, as you say, get in anywhere.' There arrived with Margaret's nod a savage assent from the sky, another roll and clanging of iron doors on the summits above.

Philip started the engine again. Margaret put out the little observation lamp and with it any fleeting sense of cosiness. The night invaded them once more; they were wet and numbed and maundering on towards a furious autumnal midnight, among cracking mountains, lost in a world of black water; they were sitting crazily behind two lamps that showed nothing but a streaming track, the flashing of the rain, and the gulf beyond. When they moved off, very cautiously hugging the right-hand side, he could hear Penderel's voice raised above the din. He was singing or at least shouting some

kind of song, like a man in his bath. The whole night was going to be one vast bath and so Penderel was singing. A queer youth!—Philip looked down on him from a great height, but then suddenly remembered that Penderel was only two years younger than himself. It was his daft drinking and shouting and singing that magnified these two years. Unlike him, Penderel didn't seem to have escaped from the War yet, and every night with him was still the night before one moved up to the line. Why didn't Margaret like him? He wanted to think about Margaret but just now there wasn't time.

There was another sharp bend in the road, not fifty yards away, and he decided to nose round it very cautiously. What a tremendous rumbling there was! Was it thunder? He shouted to the others. Margaret was leaning forward, peering out. 'Look out, Waverton,' he thought he heard Penderel shout. The bend was here, another corner as sharp as the last, and he pulled round and ran straight into roaring chaos. A torrent of water was pouring down upon the road and something struck the car, a large clod of earth or a rock, with a resounding jolt. The entire slope above seemed to be rumbling and shuttering. In another minute they would be buried or sent flying over the other side of the road. Dazed as he was, he realised

that there was just a chance of escape, and he pressed down the accelerator while he kept the other foot trembling on the brake for fear the road in front should be blocked or should have fallen away. So far it seemed to be clear, though the whole hillside immediately behind them now seemed to be crashing down. The road ran back in a curve, probably between two spurs of the hill. Margaret was shrieking in his ear: 'Lights! Look Phil. Lights! Pull in there.' He saw them not far in front, where the road seemed to bend back again, beyond the centre of its horseshoe curve. Without thinking, he began to slow down. There seemed to be some sort of gateway there, an entrance to a drive perhaps. Then the rumbling and crashing and tearing behind, growing in volume every moment, awakened him to the danger of the situation.

It was obvious now that there was a house in front, and he could see the open entrance to the drive. But what kind of place was this to stay in, with the whole hillside threatening to descend upon them and tons of water coming down from somewhere? 'We'd better go on while we can,' he shouted to Margaret. 'It's not safe here.' But at the same time he clapped on the brakes and brought the car down to a walking pace. They were now only a few yards from the gateway, were actually

sheltered by the high wall of the garden. He felt a vague sense of safety, the sight of that wall keeping at bay the terror of the water and the crumbling slope.

He caught Margaret's 'No, stop!' and instantly obeyed the cry. He did it against his judgment, yet felt partly relieved to be free for a moment from wheels and brakes. She clutched his arm and he could feel her trembling a little. 'Let's stay here,' she was gasping.

'We ought to go on while the road's still open.' His voice was hoarse and he too was shaking.

'Let's get out and see what's happening,' Penderel chimed in. 'I believe the whole damned hill's going. Something's burst up above.' He was opening the door. Horribly cramped, Philip tumbled out and joined him in the black downpour. At least it was good to be on one's legs again, and though the night was hideous, the situation seemed less precarious than it did when one was sitting in there, playing fantastic tricks with mechanism.

'Are we going to push on,' Penderel shouted, 'or stay here and ask these people for shelter? We can't go back, for that road's completely done in. And the road in front may be done in too. I'm for staying here.'

'But listen to that.' The fury behind had not spent itself and even appeared to be gathering

force. 'We're close to it,' Philip went on, 'and the whole place seems dangerous to me. It may be all washed away before morning. And really we ought to tell those people what's happening.'

Penderel walked forward, peered through the entrance, and then returned. 'They don't seem to be bothering much about it. Lights on, but no signs of alarm.'

'Perhaps they don't know.' Philip shivered. 'For that matter there may not be anybody there. They may have cleared off.'

Margaret was looking out of the car. 'Why are you standing there?' For once she sounded forlorn. 'I can't stand much more of this. It's a nightmare.'

'Penderel thinks we ought to stay here,' Philip told her. 'But I feel inclined to go on. It isn't safe here and the road in front seems to be still open.' He looked forward as far as he could and though the road was partly flooded, it revealed no dangerous obstacle.

'But is it open?' Penderel asked the question, and Margaret, still peering out, seemed to echo him.

The next moment they were answered. There came a rumble and a following roar, this time in front of them, somewhere not far away in the darkness. It seemed as if a whole side of the hill

was slipping or being washed away. The noise was deafening, terrifying, like a great buffeting of the ears; and even the ground beneath their feet seemed to tremble. The road in front had gone, and what was left of the horseshoe bend, the little stretch on which they stood, was now being rapidly flooded. 'Bring her in here,' Penderel shouted, and rushed to the drive, bent on leading the way. Philip hesitated long enough to feel the sudden chill wash of water round his legs, and then clambered back into the car. The rain was streaming down his face and he could hardly see; his hands were so numbed that they were like pieces of wood; but the engine was running and he contrived to jam in the gear and slip the clutch with only the loss of a few seconds. For a moment or two the car roared helplessly, but then it began to move slowly, with a prodigious splashing, and he turned it through the entrance and up the drive, which ran forward at a slight incline. He could see Penderel hurrying in front, a jerky and blurred figure in the rain, just like a man in a film. Now the house, surprisingly large to be in such an out-of-the-way place, towered above them. What was to be done with the car? Philip couldn't decide, so merely turned it round the corner, where the drive curved towards the front door only a few yards away, and then came to a standstill. The head lamps shone

upon the house and the door was strongly, dramatically, illuminated by their uncouth glare. It was a large door, stout enough for a little fortress, and three broad steps led up to it. Somehow it looked as if it were closed for ever.

Philip found Penderel looking in at him. 'Benighted!—that's the word,' Penderel said. 'I've been trying to remember it all the way from the gate. I'll go and beg for shelter. What a night! What a place! I like this, though, don't you?'

Philip stared after him as he walked forward to the door. The night was still a tumult, full of a distant rumbling and crashing and the ceaseless drumming of the rain, yet there seemed to fall in it now a sudden quietness. It was the house itself that was so quiet. Driving up like this, you expected a bustle, shadows hurrying across the blinds, curtains lifted, doors flung open. But so far this house hadn't given the slightest sign, in spite of its lighted windows. It seemed strangely turned in upon itself, showing nothing but a blank face in the night. You could hardly imagine that great front door ever being opened at all.

And now Penderel was there at the door, darkening it with his shadow and groping for a knocker. Philip turned to Margaret, who was leaning back, exhausted perhaps. Once inside, out of the night, warmed and dry, eyes meeting eyes again in the

light, they could perhaps talk everything out: now was their chance, before they reached home again and custom fell on them like weights of armour. He put out a reassuring hand, and though she didn't meet it with her own, he seemed to catch a faint smile. Did she whisper something? He couldn't tell. All he heard now was Penderel knocking at that door.

Chapter Two

PENDEREL thought he would give them another and louder rap. *'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller.* That's why poetry is so good, he told himself, his hand on the knocker; at such times odd bits f it come shooting up in the mind like rockets. *Rat-tatta-tat-tat.* Should he give them another and onclusive *tat-tat*, rounding the phrase? No, that lways sounded so complete that there was no rgency in it. That was loud enough anyhow, loud nough—as people said in their hellishly grim fash-on—to waken the dead. Suppose the people inside *were* dead, all stretched out with the lights quietly urning above them. Suppose one of them was ust dying or dead and the others were all crying or raying at the bedside, and he and the Wavertons narched in, 'Can you put us up for the night, lease?' But most likely the owner of the house ould be a fat little Welsh squire, and the place ould be full of dogs and drinks. He could do ith the drinks. Everything about him was soaking xcept his throat, which was Sahara itself. If peo-

ple are to be sodden, let them be sodden inside where all the real mischief's done.

There was somebody at the other side of th door at last. He had a feeling that somebody wa there, although he couldn't really hear anything This door, he was positive, would take some open ing; you couldn't imagine it flying open; it looke as if somehow it would have to be unscrewed. Yes something was happening to it. It was creaking It was moving. Now for it!—a neat little speech

The door opened an inch or two, and Pendere saw an eye. There was no talking to an eye an so he waited. The eye withdrew and then th door was slowly pulled back. A huge lump of man stood there, blankly staring at him; a shape less man with a full black beard and matted hai over a low forehead. For a minute Penderel him self was all eyes and no tongue, staring blankl back. Then he recovered himself and rapidl plunged into speech.

'We've come to ask for shelter,' he began. 'W got lost and now we're absolutely cut off. We can' go forward or back. The road seems to have gon on each side.'

He broke off for a moment to see if there wa any response to his appeal. The man made neithe sound nor movement; not a gleam of comprehen sion lit his face; he just stood there, so muc

umped flesh and staring eyes. It was as if the oor had been opened into Siberia. The thought f the menacing night and the Wavertons waiting here behind him, the contrast between their situaon and this senseless immobility suddenly angered im. He raised his voice: 'The road here's under vater now. There are floods, landslides. All the nountain side's coming down. We shall have to tay here. Don't you understand?'

If the man did, he gave no sign, but stood there s if he were staring out of another world. Penerel had a sudden desire to pound the great senseess carcase. But then he remembered that they vere now in a remote part of Wales, were really ravellers in a foreign country, and that it was quite ossible that this fellow, who was obviously some ind of servant, could hardly understand English. He might be the solitary surviving specimen of the riginal aborigines of this island. Penderel knew o Welsh and could only begin all over again, this me raising his voice and introducing some fine escriptive gestures. At the end, the man came o life, though only slowly. First, he lumbered forvard a pace, looked towards the car, examined the ight, then very laboriously and solemnly shook is head. After that, he tapped Penderel, who ooked in silence and amazement as if he were vatching the movements of some prehistoric mon-

ster, lightly on the chest, pointed indoors, tappe himself on the chest, and ended by producing fro somewhere at the back of his throat, a very que gurgling sound.

This noise made Penderel jump, it was so unex pected. 'What's that?' he cried sharply. Eve Welsh ought not to sound like that; it was as i a lump of earth had tried to make a remark.

By way of reply, the man pushed his face nea to Penderel's, opened his mouth very wide, an pointed to it with a long dark forefinger. Then h padded away, leaving Penderel to gape throug the open door. He must have retired to fetch h master, for it could hardly be his own hous though he looked more like a performing bear tha a butler. Penderel wondered whether to walk fo ward into the large hall visible through the doo or to return for a moment to the Wavertons, wh must be wondering what was happening. H turned, however, only to find them at his elbow.

'This is absurd,' Mrs. Waverton was declarin indignantly. 'Keeping us here like this! What the matter?'

He determined to put an easy face upon i 'The matter has just disappeared, to find somebod I think. Did you see him? I don't think he real.'

'What did he say?' Waverton asked.

'Nothing. I don't believe he could say any-
ing. I don't think he knows English or any-
ing else. Wait until you have a good look at
m. He's a huge troll who's got all rusty in-
de.'

Mrs. Waverton, as usual, seemed to brush away
is kind of talk. 'Let's go in, Philip. They
uldn't refuse to let us stay, an awful night like
is. And it's ridiculous standing here.'

'Isn't it?' said Penderel heartily. 'As if we
ere carol-singers and this were some kind of
evilish Christmas, perhaps Lucifer's birthday.'

'We'll go in then,' said Waverton. 'But what
out the car?'

'They'll tell us where to put it later. I *must*
down somewhere where there isn't any rain.
ly head screams with it.' And Mrs. Waverton
arched in, followed by the two men.

The first thing that Penderel noticed was that
e house had electric light. Somehow he hadn't
pected that: it was impossible to imagine the giant
oll fingering the switches or going round the
cumulators. But the lights weren't behaving
operly though; they were jumping and flickering,
d they made the whole place jumpy, queerly un-
rtain. It was the kind of hall you rarely see
cept on the stage, being both entrance hall and
unge (and, if necessary, dining and drawing

rooms), lofty and panelled, with a large open fire
place in the left-hand far corner, a broad staircas
running up on the right and a gallery above, wit
a door immediately on the left and two more o
the right. The fire was a smouldering old ruin; th
table in the centre was very old; and all the chair
seemed to be faded and crazy. There was some
thing ruinous about the whole place, and thoug
it was gloriously snug after the howling misery o
the night outside, it hardly suggested comfort an
a warm hospitality. Penderel decided that it ha
a smell of mice and old newspapers.

They all stood bunched together and drippin
near the door, and waited in silence for somethin
to happen. After the first glance round, Pender
fixed his eyes on the staircase, down which—if lif
were what it ought to be—a lady with a long whit
train should come sweeping, with a great candle
stick in each hand. He watched the stairs jum
with the lights, and had a sudden daft desire to rus
to the bottom of them, strike an attitude, and sa
something very romantic at the top of his voic
*Enter the three wettest people in Christendom: on
of them, obviously a tragic clown, approaches th
jumping stairs.* What a pity people didn't reall
think of life as a play, taking care to come on prop
erly, to say and do no more than was necessary
and then to make a good clean exit. If there wer

any drinks going later, he must point that out to Waverton: it was one of those things you can only say over a drink.

The first door on the right suddenly opened and a thin elderly man in black walked into the hall, halting when he was a few paces from them. He was followed by a waddling old woman who came up and looked them over curiously with eyes like tiny black buttons. At the back was the huge creature, who stood lumpishly near the door.

'My name is Femm,' said the thin man, 'Horace Femm. I cannot understand what is the matter. Our servant, Morgan there, is dumb.' His voice was as thin as he was, very dry and harsh, and he spoke with a curious and disconcerting precision.

Penderel cleared his throat, but Mrs. Waverton cut in before him, hastily giving their names and declaring their errand.

'Shelter?' Mr. Femm looked dubious and put his long hand to his chin. You seemed to hear bone rubbing bone.

'What is it?' the old woman suddenly screamed, making them all jump.

Mr. Femm pushed out his neck, bringing his mouth nearer to the hand she held to her ear. Instead of raising his voice he contrived to make it extraordinarily penetrating by hissing his words. The effect was strangely sinister, and indeed he

seemed to turn a malignant eye upon the woman. 'Shelter,' he hissed. 'They want to stay here all night.' It sounded rather like the villain of old-fashioned melodrama.

The other shook her head. 'They can't. We can't have them here.' Although she had examined them so thoroughly, she talked as if they weren't really there.

'You see how it is,' said Mr. Femm, in his ordinary tones. 'My sister, Rebecca here, is somewhat deaf. Morgan, as I have already pointed out, is dumb. My brother, Sir Roderick Femm, the master of this house, is confined to his bed upstairs, very old, very weak, and may not live long. Though not, I beg to assure you, without hospitable instincts, I myself am as rusty as an old file. This house is partly a barn and partly a ruin and could not accommodate you even for a night. I advise you, for your own sakes, to look elsewhere. There is, I believe, an inn about twelve miles from here.'

These people might have been living in another world; they didn't seem to know what was happening all round them; it was time now to make them understand the situation. All three began explaining at once. Mrs. Waverton went up to Miss Femm and shouted in her ear. Penderel and Waverton hustled the uncomprehending Mr. Femm to the open door and confronted him with the

black and torrential night itself, through which there still came a menacing roar.

'The road's gone on each side of this house,' cried Waverton, waving a hand to left and right. 'We can't go half a mile, let alone twelve miles. We're cut off from everywhere. Even the road below's under water.'

'For that matter,' Penderel added, determined to show Mr. Femm what sort of world he was living in, 'this place may be under water soon or even buried. The hill's crumbling on each side, and it looks as if something above here, a lake or a reservoir, has burst its banks. Listen to that.' He held up his hand impressively. The roaring really did seem louder than ever. Penderel thought he could hear the distant crashing of rocks.

Mr. Femm retreated a step, his eyes two pinpoints in a crumpled sheet of paper. Penderel hadn't seen a man look so frightened for years. What an oddity!—dense at first, and then flying into a panic. A man so thin, with so little flesh and so much shining bone ought to be braver than that; he was almost a skeleton, and skeletons, jangling and defiant, are brave enough. It's our flesh, Penderel told himself, the jellied stuff that rots so easily, which quivers and creeps, goes goosey with fright; but our bones stand up and don't give a damn. This fellow was a fraud.

Mr. Femm had now turned and gone hissing towards his sister. 'Did you hear that?' he asked her. 'They say there's been a landslide on each side of us, and floods too. The lake has burst its banks. We are trapped. We shall have to go Do you hear?' His voice had almost risen to a scream.

She was now as quiet as he was noisy. She looked him up and down contemptuously, clasped her little fat hands in front of her, and said: 'Yes, I heard I've expected it after all this rain and rain and rain. It will all come tumbling down again. God is not mocked.' She gloated over this, and looked at her brother triumphantly, her suety face alight with malice. 'You're afraid, Horace. You don't believe in God. Oh, no! But you're afraid to die You don't believe in His mercy but now you can believe in His wrath.' She looked at him steadily and then when he opened his mouth to reply, she went on again, more vehemently. 'You've seen His anger in the sky. You've heard Him in the night And you're afraid. Where's your mocking now?' She stopped, and nobody spoke or stirred for a moment. 'Well, your time hasn't come yet. This house is safe enough. This has happened before before you came back, Horace, and we were never touched.' She turned her head. 'Morgan, come here,' she shrieked, and when he came towering

above her, she screamed up at him: 'You remember the great storm, when we were cut off once before, and there were floods and landslides and the road down there was all washed away? This house was safe then, wasn't it?'

Morgan nodded and made a noise in his beard. Then he made a sweeping gesture to include the whole house, and pointed impressively to the floor.

'Morgan remembers,' cried Miss Femm. 'He means that the house was safe because it stands on a great rock.'

He shook his head affirmatively again, pointed to the back of the house, raised his finger, and then clenched his fist, grinning trollishly throughout the dumb show.

'He means that this rock comes out at the back of the house and shields it,' Miss Femm explained. 'Morgan remembers the last time we had storms like these, when this was the only place left untouched. And so you see, Horace, we can stay where we are.'

Mr. Femm had now recovered himself. 'It is obvious,' he said, looking at Mrs. Waverton, 'that you will have to remain here for the night. The misfortune is yours not ours. I am afraid we can promise you very little.'

'No beds,' screamed his sister, with that terrifying unexpectedness of hers. Penderel had begun

to cherish an intense dislike of her, and longed to bellow in return, particularly when she gave another screech: 'They can't have beds.'

'As my sister hints,' said Mr. Femm, smoothly, 'there are no beds, I am afraid, at your disposal. Indeed, this is the last house in Britain I should choose to be either a guest or a host in. But please remember that it is not mine.'

'We really don't need beds or anything, thank you. We quite understand,' Mrs. Waverton told him.

'Just a roof,' added Waverton.

'And a fire,' Penderel put in. And for the love of Mike, he whispered to himself, a drink too. A brief tussle with floods and landslides was sufficiently heartening in itself, but an acquaintance with this house, these people, was not to be undertaken feeling all cold and dark inside, without a drink.

A faint suggestion of geniality, like a leaden and watery gleam of November sunshine, crept into Mr. Femm's manner. 'Of course, of course! We can offer you a roof and a fire and some food and drink. You can spend the night sitting round the fire here, perhaps the best place a night like this. I am not sure that I want to go to bed myself to-night. Morgan, attend to the fire. You must make yourselves as comfortable as you can.' He

bent forward again and hissed: 'Perhaps we could have supper soon, Rebecca.'

'I'll see that they have some supper, Horace,' cried his sister. 'Don't give yourself airs. You're not the master here.'

'What about the car?' Waverton asked. 'Is there anywhere I could put it where it would be safe all night?'

'Your motor car? You have it outside there?' Mr. Femm twisted his long dry fingers and called Morgan from the fire. 'There are out-houses, round the corner there, on the left, where we only keep a horse and a trap now. There might be room for a motor car there. Morgan will know. Morgan, go with this gentleman and see if there is room for his motor car in the stables or coach-house.' Morgan nodded sullenly and lurched towards the door.

'What about the bags?' Waverton looked at both his wife and Penderel.

'We'll get them in,' Penderel replied.

Mrs. Waverton was emphatic. 'I simply must have mine, Philip. I'm soaked to the skin and must change my things. Bring the bags in now.'

Darkness and rain and a vague tumult still held the night. 'Thank God I'm now seeing the last of this car to-night,' Waverton said, as they tugged at the straps round the luggage grid.

'We're well out of this, though I must say this is a queer house.'

'A very queer house and very queer people,' Penderel replied, pulling at the swollen leather. 'I now know the real meaning of the phrase, "Cherchez les Femms." I've taken this old bag of mine into some damned odd places, but I have a feeling this is going to be about the oddest.'

Waverton grunted. 'It's better than capering in the dark along roads that aren't there, anyhow. It's safe and there's a roof and a fire.'

'Nothing's safe,' said Penderel, swinging out two bags. 'Perhaps this *is* the fire, and we're merely taking the bags out of the frying-pan.' He hurried round to the door and did not hesitate to jostle Morgan, who had been standing in the doorway all the time. If the man didn't like it, he could lump it, and lumping it seemed to be all he could do. A gorilla would have been a little more amiable and helpful: the man overdid his dumbness and his part as giant troll.

They all began bustling about now, just as if the hall had been suddenly turned into a railway station, Penderel thought. Mrs. Waverton, looking less like a superior person than usual (she was really rather pretty), shed her sodden hat and coat, pounced upon one of the bags, and was now exchanging confidential little shrieks with Miss

Femm. Waverton had gone out again, accompanied by Morgan, and was now steering his car round the corner into the coach-house or shed or whatever it was. Mr. Femm had gone creaking away somewhere. Penderel did his best to join in the bustle, but when he had taken off his heavy dripping coat and had flung it over his bag near the door, there was nothing left for him to do. He lit a cigarette, sat down near the fire, and dreamily regarded his steaming outstretched legs and enjoyed the creeping warmth. He was tired. Images of his companions came floating by like spectral ships: Mrs. Waverton, one of those pale and clear and terrifically educated women who knew everything and who knew nothing, never actually breaking through into the real world; Philip Waverton himself, crammed with shy sense and honest-to-God feeling, but too anxious, too married, too well broken in; the Femms here, the string-and-bone dithering male and the fat and somehow obscene female, with her revivalist God, and that tongueless hulk of a Morgan. And there was another somewhere, upstairs in bed. What was his name? Sir Roderick—that was it. Old Sir Roderick, the master of the house, doomed to be for ever upstairs silent and unseen. Did he ever give any orders? Perhaps Rebecca brought them down—what was it?—written on tables of stone.

The next moment Penderel could have groaned aloud. Suddenly that old feeling had returned. It came, as usual, without warning. A grey tide engulfing all colour and shape of things that had been or were to be, rushed across his mind, sweeping the life out of everything and leaving him all hollow inside. Once again he sat benumbed in a shadow show. Yet as ever—and this was the cruel stroke—there was something left, left to see that all the lights were being quenched, left to cry out with a tiny crazed voice in the grey wastes. This was what mattered, this was the worst, and black nights and storms and floods and crumbling hills were not to be compared with this treachery from within. It wasn't panic nor despair, he told himself, that made so many fellows commit suicide; it was this recurring mood, draining the colour out of life and stuffing one's mouth with ashes. One crashing bullet and there wasn't even anything left to remember what had come and gone, to cry in the mind's dark hollow; life could then cheat as it liked for it did not matter; you had won the last poor trick.

Having conjured the malady into a phrase or two, Penderel felt better, came out of his reverie and looked about for entertainment. He found it in the person of Mr. Femm, who was bearing down upon him, carrying a small tray. There was a

bottle on the tray, and Penderel felt like breaking into applause. *Flourish of trumpets: enter Bottle.*

'Now do you think, Mr.—er—?' Mr. Femm put down the tray and hesitated.

'Penderel,' he told him promptly—told the bottle too.

'Mr. Penderel, of course,' said Mr. Femm. 'Do you think you could join me in a drink?'

'Mr. Femm, I feel that I could, with pleasure, join you in a drink.' They were like two old club cronies.

Mr. Femm stood over the bottle. 'It is not whisky, which all you young men drink now, I believe. This is gin, which I prefer to all the other spirits, except, of course, the very old brandies. With some lemon, a little sugar perhaps, some hot water if you care for it, gin is excellent, and, remember, the purest of the spirits.'

'I do remember,' said Penderel, heartily. 'Gin for me, with pleasure. I used to drink it with the sea-dogs. The Navy, at least the commissioned part of it, has a passion for gin. After it gave up rum, it went straight to gin. The brave fellows sit round all night, dropping remarks about turbines and torpedoes, the coast of Manchuria, and beautiful blue-eyed girls, and drinking gin with admirable steadiness and ease.' He watched the other pour out the liquor, accepted lemon and sugar, re-

fused water, and then, glass in hand, remarked 'We must have a toast.'

Mr. Femm looked thoughtful, even philosophic with the faint ghost of conviviality hovering abou him. 'Mr. Penderel, I give you a toast that yo will not appreciate, being young. I give you— Illusion!' And he lifted his glass.

'I'm all for it. Illusion!' He gasped a littl for it was unusually strong stuff. But that wa better. A few more such toasts and illusion woul be something more than a wistful sentiment. 'Bu don't imagine that I'm too young to appreciate th value of illusion. I'm just the right age. I wa born too late or too early to escape the rotten truth and I've been stubbing my toes against flinty fact ever since I left school.'

Mr. Femm smiled grimly. He was about t say that that itself was one of youth's illusions Penderel could see it coming: he had heard i before. But then Mr. Femm surprised him by no speaking at all; he merely stared on after the smil had vanished and took a sip from his glass. Th next moment his eyes seemed to be looking out int horrible space and his face was twitching. H appeared to be listening. 'A dreadful night,' h muttered at last. 'It seems to be getting worse.'

'It's a brute, certainly,' Penderel replied, 'bu apparently there's no danger here. Miss Femm

nd your man seem to be positive that this house s safe enough.'

'But even if it is, we may be completely cut off, hut in here.' The man seemed to be talking to iimself rather than to Penderel.

'We might, of course, and that would be a nui- ance for you.' Penderel tried to look polite and nxious and sorry, though he did not care a fig if ie had to stay there. He was as well off there as nywhere else. He had nowhere to go, nowhere ie even wanted to go, now. Good God!—what a hing to admit to oneself at twenty-nine! 'What mean is,' he went on, 'that it's a nuisance your aving us here like this, besieged with you.'

Mr. Femm looked at him with real terror in his ace. There was no mistaking it now. He lashed iimself into a kind of anger as frightened men fre- uently do. 'But to go running out there,' and he ointed shakily at the door, still open to the night, in the dark, with the floods there, the rocks tum- ling down, everything cold and black and pitiless. And nowhere else to go, no escape!' And he clashed ogether his bony hands.

Penderel stared at him. 'A bad business, cer- ainly, if one had to go. But one hasn't, you now. Even if we have to go, you won't have to. You can stay comfortably here.' And as he said his, he looked Mr. Femm in the eyes.

Mr. Femm met the look for a second and then quickly glanced round the room. He was obviously taking hold of himself. Finally he leaned forward. 'As you can probably see,' he whispered 'I am nervous at the thought of our being shut in here. The fact is that Morgan, who is an old servant of my brother's, is an uncivilised brute. Occasionally he drinks heavily—a night like this would set him going—and once he is drunk he is very dangerous. He is as strong as an ox and could batter a door in with ease. You can imagine that I dread being compelled to remain here, with no means of escape, with such a savage.'

Penderel nodded reassuringly. 'We must try to keep the drink away from him. As a drunk and disorderly, he'd be no joke.' But he had been observing Mr. Femm very narrowly throughout his speech. All this about Morgan might be true, it probably was true, for obviously the man was almost a savage, but nevertheless Penderel was convinced that his companion was lying. It wasn't the thought of Morgan that had terrified him. There was something else; some more fearful image had haunted him when he had so suddenly and strangely cried out against remaining in the house. Perhaps there was something here even worse than a drunk and half-crazed Morgan battering doors in. Perhaps too it was only some maggot of the brain

These Femms, perched remotely on their hill, seemed to have gone queer, all maggot-brained. For a moment he stared at the one before him as if he were staring at a creature from an unknown continent.

The door behind them closed. Morgan was bolting it, and Waverton, doffing his coat, was at their elbow. 'I've put the car away,' he told Penderel. 'Just round the corner in a kind of open shed. It seems safe enough there.' He glanced round. 'Where's my wife?'

Penderel jerked a thumb to the far door on the right. 'Gone to change, I think.' Mr. Femm, still looking somewhat shaken, rose and indicated the bottle and glasses. 'Have some gin, Waverton?' Penderel suggested. 'It's jolly good.'

Waverton smiled and shook his head. 'No thanks. I don't like the stuff. Are you drinking it, Penderel? Neat, too? It'll make you feel desperately melancholy.'

'Gin is saddening,' Penderel admitted, 'but it's not so saddening as no gin.' Mr. Femm began to fill the glasses again. His hand was still trembling, and he seemed as jumpy as the daft lights, though indeed these were so bad now that they made everything seem jumpy. Such lights were crazier than darkness itself; they were like a man doing a witch-doctor's dance in a top hat and frock

coat. Penderel noticed that Waverton, now no longer a manipulator of brakes and gears but a human being, was looking about him curiously and stealing an odd glance or two at friend Femm. And well he might, Penderel told himself, and suddenly felt unreasonably sorry for Waverton. Somehow he felt that Waverton ought not to be there. Waverton wasn't like him, a man without a load, almost outlawed, naked, but a fellow who had given—what was it?—yes, hostages to fortune. He had, for example, a wife there, now changing her clothes. How odd women were, always either not quite human or too human. She had gone off to change, accompanied by a little fat deaf monster. There was something curiously pathetic about this going off and changing. In a minute she would come tripping back, all dressed up and smiling, just as if it were a party, perhaps somebody's birthday. Penderel had an odd impulse to shake Waverton by the hand, but he restrained it and stretched out his hand for the glass instead. He must though, talk to Waverton about Mr. Femm.

Chapter Three

MARGARET felt relieved at the very sight of her bag. Five minutes with it in private and she would be herself again. Dry clothes and a comb through her hair would settle everything. The last ten minutes had been dreadful. She felt all wet round her shoulders and knees, and so bedraggled, so effaced by rain and rushing darkness, that she could hardly think of herself as having the outward appearance of a complete real person It was like being a tattered ghost; you couldn't possibly face anything. It had been worse coming in here, meeting these people, than it was in the actual danger outside. The moment you were less than yourself, people were the worst of all. There had been one awful second, when this queer creature, Miss Femm, had been screaming at her brother, when she had suddenly wanted to scream herself, to clutch at Philip, to drag him to the door, back to the car. It was absurd. But she was wet and tired; the storm had got on her nerves. Once neat outside, cosy within,

she would be ready to face anything. Now fo
some dry things at last.

She picked up her bag and walked up to Mis
Femm. 'I'm dreadfully wet,' she said, producin
a splendid woman-to-woman smile. 'May I go an
change my things?'

'What?' the woman screamed at her. Of course
she was deaf. How annoying deaf people were, an
how queer: they seemed scarcely human. Mar
garet repeated her request in a loud voice, but thi
time without the smile. She felt like a ridiculou
little girl.

Miss Femm nodded. 'You look wet. You g
and change your clothes.'

'A bathroom perhaps?' Margaret shouted. Ho
silly she sounded! 'Will you please show m
where to go?'

'You'll have to go in my bedroom. That's a
there is.' There was no note of apology in thi
Miss Femm seemed to be enjoying herself
'There's no bathroom, not now. It's all in ruin
You couldn't get inside the door. We're all i
ruins here. You'll have to put up with it.' Onl
the tiny snapping eyes were alive in that dough
face of hers. They went travelling over Margare
like two angry little exiles in a hateful country.

'I quite understand. It's very good of you t
have us here.' Margaret made a movement t

show that she was tired of standing there with the bag in her hand.

'Come with me then.' Miss Femm turned and went waddling away. Margaret, following behind, expected her to make for the staircase and was surprised to find her going towards a door on the left. They passed through this door and walked down a very dimly lit corridor that had an uncarpeted stone floor. Margaret shivered: the place was like a cellar. There was a big window on the left, without curtains, brightly slashed with rain until she came up to it, and then it was all black, with the night roaring outside. This must be the back of the house then. A little further on, however, they came to a door on the same side as the window. Miss Femm halted, her hand on the knob. It flashed upon Margaret that if this door were opened the wind and the rain and the darkness would come in, and they would walk through it back into the night. But she must be sensible; this wasn't the place for silly fancies; there must be a little wing, of course, jutting out here.

'You came yourselves, didn't you?' cried Miss Femm, still standing at the door. 'You thought it better to be here than out there, eh? Well, you'll have to put up with it. We're all going to pieces here. You'd have been proud to come here once; you'd have thought my brother, Sir Roderick, a

great man then; and so he was, in a way. But no in God's way. None of them were that. And now they're all rotting, going to pieces, choked with dust, like this house. We've done with life here what you'd call life.' Her voice had risen to a scream again.

There was no reply to this and Margaret didn't try to make any. With someone else she might have ventured some soothing meaningless remark but you couldn't do that at the top of your voice. The woman was obviously a little mad, probably touched with religious mania, and if she had lived here all her life there was some excuse for her. After all, there was no reason to be alarmed. These were only the old apologies (I'm afraid you'll find us all upset, Mrs. Waverton) in a new fantastic shape. So she said nothing but nodded sympathetically. There was something comforting in the very weight of the bag she was holding.

Miss Femm opened the door. 'I've none of this electric light. I won't have it. You'll have to wait till I've lit the candles.' She went in and Margaret waited in the doorway. The room was not quite dark for a sullen glow of firelight crept about in it. Margaret took heart. A fire was more than she had expected. It was all going to be quite pleasant. Two candles were alight now, one on a rather high mantelshelf and the other on a little dressing-

table 'Come in,' Miss Femm shouted, 'and shut the door.'

The room was not very large; it seemed to be crowded with heavy furniture; and it was closely shuttered. You couldn't imagine it ever having had an open window. The place was muggy and stale, smelling as if it were buried deep in dirty old blankets. On the left was a big bed, piled suffocatingly high with clothes, and an enormous wardrobe so top-heavy that it seemed to be falling forward. A wood fire smouldered in a little iron grate. On the other side of the fireplace were a massive chest of drawers, looking as if they bulged with folded alpaca and flannel and moth-balls, the little dressing-table, which had a tiny cracked mirror on it, and a dismal wash-hand-stand. The walls seemed to be crowded with old-fashioned oleographs and steel engravings of an hysterically religious kind, full of downy-bearded and ringleted Saviours, and with ornamented texts about the Prince of Love and the Blood of the Lamb. Having once glanced about, Margaret kept her eyes away from the walls. Next week, to-morrow even, these things would probably seem funny; the whole room would be a remembered joke; but at the moment it was all rather horrible. It was all so thick and woolly and smelly

There was a chair near the fire and Margaret

promptly took possession of it. She felt rather sick. Miss Femm, a thick little image, stood watching her at the other side of the fireplace. Why didn't the creature go? Margaret pulled the bag towards her and began to unfasten it. 'Thank you,' she called, looking up. 'I can manage quite well now.' It was a relief to see her own things, so familiar, so sensible, snugly waiting her in the open bag.

Miss Femm suddenly shattered the silence. 'I stay down here,' she shrieked, 'because it's less trouble and it's quiet. My sister Rachel had this room once, after she'd hurt her spine. She died here. I was only young then, but she was younger than I was, only twenty-two when she died. That was in ninety-three, before you were born, eh?'

Margaret nodded and kicked off a shoe. She hoped this wasn't opening a chapter of reminiscence. She wanted to change and get out of this place. The very thought of the hall, with Philip and the others there, seemed pleasant now.

'Rachel was a handsome girl, wild as a hawk always laughing and singing, tearing up and down the hills, going out riding. She was the great favourite. My father and Roderick worshipped her and let her have all her own way. All the young men that came followed her about. Then it was all Rachel, Rachel, with her big brown eyes and her

red cheeks and her white neck. She found a young man to please her at last, but one day she went out riding and they brought her back in here. She was six months on that bed and many an hour I spent listening to her screaming. I'd sit there by the bedside and she'd cry out for me to kill her, and I'd tell her to turn to Jesus. But she didn't, even at the end. She was godless to the last.'

With both shoes off now, Margaret was waiting impatiently for the woman to go. She didn't want to listen but there was no escape from that screeching voice nor from the image it called up of the long-dead Rachel Femm, who would remain with her like a figure from a bad dream. Somehow she felt as if the broad road of life were rapidly narrowing to a glittering wire. She must hurry, hurry. She stood up, pointedly turned her back on her companion, and began taking things out of the bag.

But Miss Femm did not stir. In another minute, she was talking again, this time, it would seem, more to herself than to Margaret. 'They were bad enough before here, but after Rachel died they were worse. There was no end to their mocking and blaspheming and evil ways. They were all accursed, whether they stayed here or went away. I see that now. They were all branded. They were marked down one by one. I see His hand in it now. And it's not finished yet. Sometimes He will

reveal His great plan to the least of His servants He's out there to-night. He's out there now.'

This was awful. In despair, Margaret sat down and began peeling off her stockings. She knew that the woman's eyes were now fixed upon her; she could feel their beady stare.

Miss Femm was quieter now that her interest had narrowed to Margaret. 'You're married, aren't you?'

Margaret reached out for her towel so that she could dry her feet. 'Yes. My husband's out there in the hall.' Philip turned into something different, something intangible and yet substantial, like a big account in a bank, as soon as she called him *my husband*. This thing was not to be confused with the exciting personal adventure called *Philip*.

'Which one?' Miss Femm was asking. 'The quiet dark one or the other?'

'Yes, the quiet dark one.' Margaret rubbed away and suddenly felt proud of Philip for being a quiet dark one.

'The other's a godless lad. I saw him. There isn't much I don't see. He's got wild eyes, and he's one of Satan's own. I've seen too many of them, coming here laughing and singing and drinking and bringing their lustful red and white women here, not to know. He'll come to a quick bad end. If I'd have known, he wouldn't have set foot in

this house.' Miss Femm was screaming again and she had now moved forward a pace or two. But it was quite evident that she had no intention of going, so Margaret did not hesitate any longer but continued changing hastily. The room was horribly oppressive; you seemed to breathe dirty old wool. As she pulled on dry stockings she was annoyed to find that her hands were trembling.

'Yes, they'd even bring their women here.' Miss Femm's voice was edged with hate. 'This house was filled with sin. Nobody took any notice of me, except to laugh. Even the women, brazen lolling creatures, smothered in silks and scents, would laugh. They went years ago, and they're not laughing now, wherever they are. And you don't hear any laughing here. If I came among them—my own father and brothers, my own blood—they'd tell me to go away and pray, though they never used to tell Rachel to go away and pray. Yes, and I went away and prayed. Oh yes, I prayed.'

This was poor crazed stuff, but Margaret seemed to hear those prayers, terribly freighted. She stood up now, before pulling off her dress, and saw, so vividly in the candle light from the mantelshelf, one side of the swollen face, a fungus cheek. It looked like grey seamed fat, sagging into putrefaction. The woman's whole figure seemed so much dead matter, something that would just stay there

and rot. Only her voice and her little eyes were alive, but these were dreadfully alive; and they would remain, screeching and cursing, staring and snapping, when everything else had rotted. Oh what nonsense was this? The poor old creature was infecting her. She must be sensible, she told herself, and found relief in pulling off her dress.

After the last outburst, Miss Femm's mood seemed to change. 'I've kept myself free from all earthly love, which is nothing but vanity and lusts of the flesh. You'll come to see that in time, and then it may be too late to give yourself, as I've done to the Lord. Just now, you're young and handsome and silly, and probably think of nothing but your long straight legs and white shoulders and what silks to put on and how to please your man; you're revelling in the joys of fleshly love, eh?'

Margaret was only too glad that she was busy rubbing her shoulders with the towel, for this talk made her want to rub and rub, to wipe every word away as soon as it reached her. This stuff was even worse than the other. She towelled away at her bared arms and shoulders and made no reply.

Miss Femm didn't seem to care. She went on staring and said at last: 'Have you given him a child?'

That, at least, could be answered. 'Yes, we've one child,' Margaret told her, 'a girl, four years

old. Her name's Betty.' How queer to think of Betty now! She suddenly saw her asleep in that nursery, far away, not merely in Hampstead, in another world. But no, Betty wasn't in another world—that was the awful thing—she had come into the same world as this Femm woman, yes, and that other, Rachel, who had once screamed on that bed. Her heart shook. She wanted to rush back to Betty at once.

'Betty,' Miss Femm began. 'I once knew a Betty.'

'I don't want to hear, I don't want to hear,' Margaret repeated to herself, and somehow contrived to beat off the words that followed as she picked up the blue dress she had taken out of her bag. It was a lovely dress—almost new, and Philip and Muriel Ainsley had both admired it—and it might conquer everything, make this night all clean and sensible again at a stroke. Lovingly she unfolded it.

When she looked up again, she was surprised to find that Miss Femm, now silent, was much nearer than she had been before. The eyes in that swollen, grey, fatty mask were now fixed upon her. She shivered, suddenly feeling as if she were standing there naked.

Miss Femm came nearer, stretched out a hand and touched the dress. 'That's fine stuff, but it'll

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rot. And *that's* finer stuff still, but it'll rot too i time.'

'What's finer stuff?' Margaret was looking dow at her dress as she asked the question.

'*That is.*' And the hand that had been fingerin the dress was suddenly pushed flatly and coldl against the bare skin, just above her right breas

Margaret sprang back, sick and dazed, all he skin shuddering from that toad-like touch, 'Don't! she gasped. She was going to fall, to faint; th room was slithery with beastliness, dark with swarm ing terrors. Then anger came shooting up like rocket, and cleared the air. She felt herself tower ing. 'How dare you!' she blazed at her. She mad a sudden movement, shaking herself, and Mis Femm retreated, mumbling.

There was a knock at the door. Margaret jumpe and looked round, then turned to Miss Femm, wh was still mumbling. 'There's someone at the door she shouted. 'You'd better see who it is.' Th other looked across and then, without a word, too the candle from the mantelshelf and went slowl to the door, opened it an inch or two and peepe out. The next moment it had shut behind her.

The room darkened and grew as soon as Mis Femm had left it. But of course there was onl one candle now; it sent Margaret's shadow sprawl ing gigantically across the foot of the bed. Sh

urned her eyes away. She did not want to look at hat bed. It was growing ghostly; the whole room vas filling with ghosts. If she looked at that bed ong enough she might see a wasted hand thrust out of it, and meet the eyes of that girl, Rachel Femm. She had heard Rebecca Femm, perhaps it was time now for her to hear Rachel Femm. No, no; things were not really like that; they kept their sanity even if people didn't; it was only yourself that pushed you over the edge, where the horrors began. She wouldn't look again, but she'd be sensible inside and busy herself with the familiar comforting things.

But she couldn't put on that dress yet: she didn't feel clean; she wouldn't feel really clean for days, but something could be done to wipe away that hand. She could feel it yet. There was some water in a jug on the wash-hand-stand. She stared at it for a moment, disliking the thought of using it, but finally dipped her towel in it and then rubbed herself hard. She was very tired now and still trembling a little, but the rubbing made her feel better. After she had put on her dress, she sat down in front of the little cracked mirror (turning twitching back to the ghosts) and hastily, shakily, idied her hair. The familiar reflection brought omfort to her; its peeping blue eyes and lifted nouth sent a message to say that she was Margaret

Waverton, that Philip was waiting for her a few yards away, that the car was only round the corner that they were merely taking shelter in a funny old house among the Welsh mountains. After that message she had time to powder her nose. Then she put away all the things she had taken off and fastened the bag. I'm treating you now, she told the house, as if you were a railway station; you're not worthy of having an open bag in you and some stockings left to dry.

She could go now, walk out of this horrible room for ever. (How did she know she could? What if she were brought back in here, to lie in that bed and scream, like Rachel Femm?) She took up the candle and her eye fell on a text just above: *The Lord is my Shepherd.* She suddenly saw a vast herd of Rebecca Femms. What was their shepherd like? And somewhere behind all that was a beautiful idea, something to do with Betty snuggled into her pillow or with Philip smoking his pipe in the garden on summer nights; and it was all buried suffocated. The very air of this room, atmosphere made out of dirty wool, would suffocate anything. Well, it was her turn now: she would show the room something, however badly she might be behaving. So she put down her candle, drew back the heavy curtains from the window, jerked up the blind, and, after a struggle with the rusty fastening

nd the stiff cord, opened the window. The night me roaring in with a sweep of wind and rain, but e air was unbelievably fresh and sweet. She stood ere for a moment, lifting her face towards the ow friendly darkness, and strangely she felt the ars gathering in her eyes. A gust of wind blew ut the candle. She turned away, found her bag, nd walked to the door. When she came to close it rom outside, she could see nothing of the room for ow all was darkness there, but she seemed to hear e rain, blown in through the window, faintly pat-ring on the floor.

As she went back along the corridor, she decided at she wouldn't tell Philip what had happened. e wanted to tell him, but that would have to wait; e couldn't tell him until things were absolutely ead right between them again, when they would egin once more to share everything, halving oughts and swapping dreams. Things ought to like that now, this very minute, she told her-lf; it would make all the difference here, in this lace, where one was so lonely, lost. If she had nown this was going to happen—but then of course e hadn't. She never thought of things like this, nd Philip did—it had been one of her complaints, at silly anxiousness of his—and he ought to ave made the move. They could have walked into is together then, just a dark night's adventure.

She had had an impulse to say something too earlier, but you couldn't break the months of smoot politeness (Did you sleep well? Very well, thank Did you?) with a few words shouted in a car dur ing an incessant downpour. And now she couldn begin. It would be nothing but humiliating sur render, with Philip pretending elaborately to he that it wasn't. No, this night at least she must se it through in silence.

She had probably seen the worst of it, though and everything would now become sensible agai instead of getting more and more out of hand, open ing pits under your feet. (Though nerves accounte for most of it; and days and nights of rain an Penderel's company—he loved to make the simple thing seem sinister and unmanageable, even h stupid jokes were wild, unpleasant—would accoun for nerves.) The rest would be merely discomfo and the writhing memory of that room. But there were only another woman there (not tha horror), someone of her own kind who would un derstand a word or a glance, it would be better.

Yes, everything was all right, she told herself she pushed open the door into the hall. The me were there, looking comfortable enough. And ther were signs of supper on the table. Food—even that woman had a hand in it—would make a differ ence. She walked across to them, smiling. Woul

they notice that something had happened to her? Philip might, and he was looking at her, smiling too, though rather vaguely. Now that she saw him again, that room seemed miles away, shrank to a pin-point of terror.

She put down the bag and walked up to Philip. 'You must have wondered what had become of me,' she told him.

'No, they told me you'd gone to change.' He was surprisingly casual.

'Didn't you think I'd been a long time?' she asked, hoping that he wouldn't think she was fishing for a compliment as she used to do in the old days.

He shook his head and smiled. 'I didn't expect you back so soon. You've been quicker than usual.'

It was astonishing. She felt as if she had been away for hours, just because she had gone through that adventure, been jammed into all manner of queer horrible lives for a few minutes, while they had smoked a cigarette or two and chatted by the fire. 'I seem to have been away a long time,' she replied, lamely. It was rather frightening, this difference in the point of view, leaving you so lonely.

'Good for you, Mrs. Waverton!' Penderel called out to her from the other side of the fireplace. 'You make it look like a party. I knew you would.

And there's supper coming, though of course it' not polite to mention it.'

It was one of his silly remarks, but for onc he did not irritate her and she smiled across a him. But, strangely enough, instead of givin her his usual grin in return, he gave her a curiousl unsmiling but kind, even sympathetic, glance. I was just as if he knew what had been happening That, of course, was absurd, but still there wa something very strange in his look.

'Supper will be ready in a few minutes, Mr Waverton,' said a harsh voice at her elbow. Th was that long bony creature, Mr. Femm. She ha forgotten his existence, but now she looked at hi with a new and rather creepy interest. 'We hav very little to offer you, I am afraid,' he went o 'but you will understand that we were not expec ing company. We have to live very simply here He moved forward to help Morgan, who had ju entered, to unload a tray. Morgan, too, she ha almost forgotten, and now she looked curiously his bearded sullen face and gigantic bulk. For o moment he raised his heavy head and his eyes m hers and some kind of intelligence seemed to dav in them. Then, from behind him, a third figu appeared, to busy itself at the table. It was Mi Femm.

Philip was asking her if she was hungry.

m; just about ready for anything,' he added. And by the way, we're probably entirely cut off by his time. It's just possible, I understand, that soon ve couldn't get out of the house even if we wanted o. Not that it matters, of course, for a few ours, an odd night. We're not too badly off here, hough probably there won't be much sleep for us.' t was just the kind of thing she had wanted to void doing, but somehow it was done before she ould think. She had slipped a hand through his rm and was now pressing it close.

Chapter Four

PENDEREL left his chair, and th three of them, making a little grou in front of the fire, talked in whis pers. Margaret had released Phil ip's arm and was now feeling rathe foolish. She had just caught sigh of a loaf of bread and a large piece of cheese, an the solid ordinariness of them had suggested to he that she was in danger of behaving like a tire hysterical woman.

'It's absurd,' said Penderel, 'that we should hav to be so secretive about food. Why should we hav to pretend it isn't there until our hosts point it ou to us? I'd like to live in a country where all gues gathered round the table and were expected to mak comments as each dish appeared. They'd sa "What's this you're putting on the table? Oh, ye splendid! We all like that"; or "Don't bring th cabbage in for us. We never touch it." What d you think?'

'It would suit me,' said Philip. 'But I don know how hostesses would like it.'

'They wouldn't,' Margaret replied for them. '

would be beastly.' She liked the glance that Philip had given her; it wasn't so blank; there was friendliness, a hint of long intimacy, in it. She smiled at him.

Philip returned the smile. 'You don't understand hostesses, Penderel. I suspect you've never really been behind the scenes.' But his thoughts were with Margaret. She was different somehow. She was thawing. He wished there was time and opportunity to talk, really to talk, with all cards quietly set out on the table. Perhaps there would be, later. This would be just the place for it, so remote, so strange, where, so to speak, you couldn't hide any cards as you could at home.

Penderel thought he would keep on, though really he had nothing to say. He was like a hostess himself. But they seemed to like it, and it eased the situation. 'Now that's not true,' he cried. 'I have imagination and we imaginative fellows are always behind the scenes, and so we suffer with all our hosts and hostesses but must only smile and smile, like true guests. Women don't suffer like that, do they, Mrs. Waverton, because though they know what's going on when they are guests, they don't identify themselves with it, but stand on their dignity as guests and are as aloof as High Court Judges.'

'No, they don't, Mr. Penderel.' She was sharp

but very friendly. She liked him much better her than she had done in the outside world, in civilisa tion. 'They only appear to do. It's no use, yo can't deceive us. You don't understand women a all. You don't know anything about them.'

'That's true,' Penderel confessed. 'I don't un derstand 'em. I don't even pretend to. Anothe thing, I don't like the fellows who do.'

'Neither do I,' said Philip. 'It's a funny thing but the men who write little books about women or lecture about them, or pretend to specialise i them in their novels are always complete bounders You must have noticed that, Penderel?' He had said this before—he could almost read the numbe of times in Margaret's glance, demure, amused, tol erant—but he spoke with conviction. The though of those greasy experts suddenly annoyed him.

'I have noticed it.' Penderel was very emphatic 'They're nasty, crawly lads, who'd be better em ployed selling lipsticks. Why women themselve can't see it, I don't know. They seem to love 'em.'

'There you go again!' Margaret was amused by the pair of them, so intolerant and self-right eous, so young mannish. 'I believe the secret o your hostility is simple jealousy. You're both jeal ous because these men seem to be so attractive. They instantly denied the charge, but let her con

tinue. 'And anyhow, sensible women don't like them very much, probably don't like them at all in their heart of hearts. But one can't help being interested and curious, of course.'

'One can,' said Philip, gloomily, 'or one ought to try. Too many people are interested and curious nowadays. We're all becoming tasters. We sit at the back of our minds watching our sensations like people at a music hall, and we find ourselves yawning between the turns. It's impossible to be happy, or even cheerful, that way. I'm no better than anybody else; we seem to be all alike. But I do draw the line somewhere. If some silly bounder of a woman became a Man expert, and wrote little books or went round lecturing on Man, I wouldn't waste a minute reading her or go a yard to hear her talk. Very few men would.'

'No, and simply because you are all so conceited,' Margaret told him. She was beginning to enjoy this, and for the moment had even forgotten where they were. 'We're so anxious to have men's opinion because we're not conceited, though, thank goodness, we're beginning to lose our silly humility. You are convinced that no woman could tell you anything worth hearing about yourselves; but even if you thought she could, you'd still take care to keep out of the way so that your complacency shouldn't be disturbed.'

'There's something in that,' Philip admitted, and immediately thought how complacent he sounded. Was he really? Margaret was waking up delightfully, suddenly flowering in this darkness.

Penderel was staring about him. 'I suppose this counts as dining out. In a day or two we shall be able to say: "The other night when I dined with the Femms." That brings it down to commonplace, lets the daylight in, with a crash. I don't know why it should, but it does.'

'I'm glad it does,' said Philip. 'I like the commonplace. It's the little trim lighted bit of life with God-knows-what waiting for you if you just go over the edge. Some people I know say they hate waking in the morning and leaving their dreams, but it seems to me that either they must lead a ghastly waking life or they must be crazy. I'm always glad to wake in the morning and find myself out of my dreams, which always turn me into a poor shaking barbarian wandering in the dark compelled to do some idiotic thing with terror all round me. Ordinary life's bad enough but it's a prince to the stuff we spin out of our rotten unconsciousnesses every night. Don't you think so?'

'I'm not sure.' Penderel stopped to consider the question. 'I think I must be one of the other people. I often have a splendid time in dreams and hate waking up. Perhaps when I wake up, I

nd into one of your dreams. It sounds like it om your description of them, which seems to me fair account of life on some days. Perhaps we're l mixed up, your dreams are my waking life, and on.'

'Just like Alice, in "Through the Looking Glass," ou know,' said Margaret. 'She was told she was nly part of the King's dreams—was it the Red ing or the White one?—and didn't she begin to y? I remember how I used to be awfully sorry r her.'

'Yes. Supposing that Mr. Femm there was eaming us!' And then Penderel was sorry he d spoken. He thought Mrs. Waverton looked artled, as if she had suddenly remembered some- ing that had been forgotten during their prattle. ut what could she have remembered? Simply that ey were here. Or had she learned something hile she was out of the room with the queer Miss emm? Perhaps she knew what he did not know, mely, why Mr. Femm was so frightened. How range if she were harbouring, behind that bright ce, some fearful piece of knowledge, the image some terrifying shape!

'More likely that we're dreaming them.' Philip wered his voice. 'Not Femm himself perhaps, ough he's queer enough. But the other two. hey're just the kind of people I might dream

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about, particularly that great dumb fellow—what his name?—Morgan. He's the worst.'

Margaret could not resist it. 'The other one Phil, Miss Femm——' she whispered.

He lowered his head. 'What about her?'

'She's a horror.'

Philip looked at her quickly, then pretended indignation. 'Well, that's a fine thing to say about your hostess.'

'No, I mean it, Phil. She's a horror. She makes me feel sick. I don't want to go near her.'

Philip was serious now. 'Why, what's she been doing?'

'Oh nothing, really. It's not that, it's just what she *is*. I'll tell you later.' Margaret turned round to find Mr. Femm almost at her elbow. Supper was ready, he told them.

The coldest of cold suppers awaited them on the table. There was the red ruin of a great joint of beef, a dish of cold potatoes, and plenty of bread, butter and cheese. Miss Femm, with her eyes narrowed and her mouth folded away, was already seated on the left-hand side. Philip and Margaret sat down on the near side; Mr. Femm seated himself opposite his sister; and Penderel marched round to the other side and sat down with his back to the front door. Morgan, looking more sullen than ever, hung about behind Miss Femm.

Philip looked round the table and fell to won-
ring. When he had first taken leave of the car
d the rain and the darkness, his senses had been
unted and he had merely enjoyed, in a numb
shion, the shelter and the warmth and the feeling
security. Now his senses were sharp again and
began to tease himself with questions. Penderel
ught his eye and grinned. This was Penderel's
ea of a night, he told himself. It wasn't his.
nd then he suddenly admitted to himself that he
dn't like this house and the people in it. These
ople had lived too long away from everybody
d were now half crazy, and the house was musty
th their mutual suspicion and resentment. Even
mm himself, who was at least civilised, was un-
voury in some queer way. Fine thoughts, these,
r an uninvited guest about to diminish these peo-
e's small store of food.

'Tell me, Philip,' Margaret said, 'why these
ghts are so jumpy? They're getting on my
rves. They make everything look so unreal.'

'Evidently they make their own light here,' he
ld her, pleasantly matter-of-fact. 'And there's
mething wrong with the batteries or the wiring.
ou can't be surprised, a night like this, whatever
ey do. So don't be alarmed if they go out al-
gether.'

Margaret nodded in silence. The thought of

being left in total darkness filled her mind. H
skin tightened and shrank again from a clam
touch. If those lights did go out, she would
move a yard from the fire and Philip until morni

Mr. Femm, who had exchanged a remark w
Penderel, now remembered his duties as a h
and stretched a hand towards the dish of potato

'Stop!' screamed his sister, making them all jun
'What are you doing? We're not all heathe

He brought back his hand, folded his arms, a
looked across at her with a sneer on his face. Th
he glanced at the others and spoke to them i
voice that was out of reach of her ears. 'I had f
gotten that my sister, who is nothing if not a g
Christian, would want to ask a blessing. We sh
enjoy our food so much more once she has cal
the attention of her tribal deity to us.'

'Horace Femm,' she cried across the table, 'you
blaspheming. If I can't hear, I can see. The
blasphemy written across your face.'

He leaned forward and used that curious hiss
voice which they had noticed before. 'My d
Rebecca, I was merely telling your guests, w
were wondering why they were not being serv
that you were about to ask a blessing, to thank G
for His bounty and His mercy, for this ample a
delectable supper ——'

'That will do,' she screamed at him. 'I know ur mocking lying tongue.'

'—— For the health and prosperity and happi- ss granted to this family, for these years of peace d plenty, for all our pleasant days and quiet ghts. Thank Him not only for yourself but for e, and for Roderick, and for Saul ——'

'Stop, you fool!' She threw out her hand as e yelled and glared at him across the table, and mediately the spirit, which had made his voice op wormwood, died out of him. He looked con- sed and frightened, and sank back into his chair. here followed a moment's silence. They were all tle frozen figures. Then Miss Femm bent her ad and gabbled a grace.

'You think you're safe now, Horace, and you've d something to drink.' She was busy filling the ates at her side with slices of beef, and she spoke ore quietly. 'And now you think you can afford let that bad tongue of yours wag again. You'll sorry you didn't keep it still.'

He roused himself. 'I am sorry I have had a nd in this ridiculous scene,' he told her. Then turned to Margaret and showed her the ghost of smile. 'I must apologise for these exhibitions —what shall I say?—rural eccentricities. We ve lived so long alone here that we have forgot- n how to behave in front of visitors. Even I,

who only returned here during the War and ha
known the world, have forgotten my manners. W
are old and rusty, mountain hermits. You mu
excuse us.'

This was as embarrassing as the rest of it, a
Margaret was glad to busy herself with the pot
toes that he somewhat fantastically proffered wi
his apology. Philip and Penderel, having e
changed glances across the width of the table, sa
nothing but tried to be bustling with plates a
slices of bread and the cruet. Good old eatin
thought Penderel, it'll carry anything off. Not th
he minded these little family quarrels of t
Femms, he told himself; he rather enjoyed the
They were like a passage from a new kind of m
rality play; a short scene for the sneering bone a
the screaming flesh.

Nobody spoke. It was one of those silences n
easily broken; their strength is tested by a tap
two of words tried over in the mind, and then th
are left alone. Margaret bent over her pla
Philip was idly watching Miss Femm, who w
heaping red meat on the plate that Morgan held o
to her. The man looked so huge and savage th
it seemed strange to see him with a plate at a
He ought to have taken the joint itself in his ha
hands and retired mumbling into a corner to gn

Philip turned to his supper, and wondered who uld speak next.

In another moment he was answered. The whole rld spoke next. What happened was the last ng that any of them expected to happen. They jumped and looked towards the door, now morous with repeated and urgent rappings.

'What's that?' cried Miss Femm. 'The door?'

'Yes,' roared Penderel, enjoying the sound of own voice. 'There's someone outside.'

'They can't come in,' she shrieked.

'Who can it be?' Mr. Femm looked from one the other and his voice quavered.

Penderel answered him. 'More visitors. Be-hted, like us.' He looked across at Waverton d grinned.

'They can't come in,' Miss Femm shrieked again. This angered Philip and he found his voice. hat's what they are, I expect,' he told Mr. Femm. ou'll have to let them in, of course. It's prob-y dangerous to be out now.'

The knocking had stopped now. There was a nt sound of voices. Mr. Femm glanced rapidly m Philip to his sister. Then the knocking be-n again.

Penderel stood up. 'The poor beggars must be f drowned. We can't keep them waiting there.'

'No, we shall have to let them in.' Mr. Femm

bent forward and looked at his sister. 'Of cou
they will have to come in, if they want shel
Morgan, go and open the door.'

Miss Femm pushed back her chair and loo
up at Morgan. 'Go on then,' she cried, point
to the door. 'And I'll come with you and see v
they are.' Morgan lumbered forward and v
slowly drew back the bolts. When he had ope
the door an inch or two so that Miss Femm mi
peer out, it was unexpectedly thrown wide o
and someone came in, pushing past the two at
door. It was a girl, all wet and muddy. She ca
further into the room, stopped to draw a l
breath, then threw herself into the nearest ch
and cried: 'My God! What a night!'

She was followed by a bulky middle-aged m
equally wet and muddy. For a moment he st
there looking about him and gasping for bre
Then he removed his dripping hat and showed th
a ruddy face with a heavy shaven jowl. 'Thou
you were never going to open that door. Ne
knew such a night. There's a reservoir burst
something and a big landslide. Smashed my
and only just got away with our lives. Doub
you're safe here. Phew!' He mopped his
and then looked from one to another of th
'Sorry to barge in like this, but you see how i
Who's the owner here?'

Philip suddenly recognised the man. 'Why,' e cried, stepping forward, 'surely you're Sir Wil-am Porterhouse? I thought so. I'm Waverton, f Treffield and Waverton, architects. You once lled to see us about something.'

'So I did.' Sir William extended a hand. 'I member you now. This your place?'

Philip explained the situation and everybody was troduced. The girl was presented to them as liss Gladys Du Cane. She had now taken off her at and coat and stood revealed as a very pretty rl in her early twenties. She was slightly below edium height (an inch or two shorter than Mar-aret) and squarely though finely built. Her hair as thick and dark and crisp, and she had full hazel es, and a wide-lipped scarlet mouth setting off a ther pale face. Margaret decided at once that e girl belonged to a type that she detested. It as curious to see her here, so far from Shaftes-ry Avenue and the lights and the dance bands d the theatres and the film agencies that were r obvious background. It was just as if an elec-ic sign had found its way into the room. But these o people, insufferable though they might be in her circumstances, were not unwelcome. They ade everything seem less fantastic and mysterious d unbearable.

'No telephone here, I suppose?' Sir William h
turned to Mr. Femm.

'No telephone or any other sign and mark
civilisation,' Mr. Femm told him. 'You are n
completely cut off from the world, sir, but a
parently this house will not suffer from the floo
and the landslides.'

'The road must have gone completely at ea
side now,' said Philip. He remembered now
had resented the magnate's super-man airs in tow
and found a certain malicious pleasure now in t
sight of his helplessness. It would do him goo
'It was impassable when we came here, thre
quarters of an hour ago. I can't imagine how y
got here at all.'

'We must have been just behind you.' Sir W
liam found a chair and drew up to the table. 'Thi
I saw your lights once. I pressed on, no go
going back, and found myself in a devil of a situ
tion. Car was nearly under water, stopped, start
again, stopped again, then ran into a landslide
something of that sort. The bonnet was hit by
flying rock, the wheels were stuck, and in a minu
the car was half buried. Took us all our time
get out.'

'How did you find this place?' Philip asked hi

'Left the car there. It's there now if it has
been washed into the valley—damn shame, too

s a little Hispano I had made specially, to drive yself—only car I ever cared about. Always the me though, care about a thing and it's done in fore you can say "knife." Well, we crawled out d didn't know where we were. Pitch black and ining like fury and water spouting all over the ace. Had to leave everything, bags and all. No e going back, I said, we hadn't passed a light or gns of a house for miles. We went on, sloshing mud, up to the knees in water, climbing over cks. We'd an electric torch but that wasn't much od. Then we saw a light and made for it as st we could. And here we are, and here we'll ve to stay, at least till morning and perhaps nger. It's getting worse out there. You'd think was the end of the world after being out in it r ten minutes; I don't mind telling you I thought was nearly through. Can I use this glass?' He oduced a flask from his pocket, emptied it into e glass, and promptly swallowed the inch of isky in one gulp.

'Hello!' his late companion called across. ou've not finished it, have you?'

'Afraid I have, Gladys.' And he showed her e flask.

'Well, I must say, Bill, you *are* a pig.' And the rl made a face when he threw her a rather per-nctory 'Sorry.' She was now sitting close to the

fire and, having pulled off the high boots she ha
been wearing, was holding out one steaming silk
stockinged foot after another near the blaze.

'I've got a pair of slippers with me that I had i
the car,' she confided to Margaret, 'and that's all
have got. What a night! I'll bet you had it pretty
rough, didn't you?'

'Yes, it was very bad,' Margaret answered, in
differently.

'Well, we're out of it now all right unless th
place is swamped during the night.' Then sh
lowered her voice. 'Any beds going?'

Margaret shook her head. 'No, we shall hav
to stay in here all night.' Her voice sounded stif
unfriendly, and that was a pity perhaps, but reall
she couldn't help it. She had spent years dislikin
the type at a distance and she couldn't change in
few minutes just because this obvious week-endin
chorus girl had chanced to come under the sam
roof, out of the same wild night. The man w
different. She didn't mind him. Indeed, his ver
bluffness and vulgarity would be useful her
breeding a coarse sanity in this queer situation.

They were returning to supper now. Morga
had lurched off with his plate, and the othe
were settling down again at the table. The baron
confessed that he was ready for some cold meat an
bread and cheese, and had found a place betwee

Margaret and Mr. Femm. 'Come along, Gladys,' e called, 'if you want something to eat. We inter-upted this little supper party and we've been asked o join it.'

'Righto,' she cried. 'I'm coming.' And Pen-erel brought up a chair for her and she sat down y his side. He noticed that she met the long stare f Miss Femm, now so much folded and silent fat, ith a smile that was deliciously near a grin. It asn't mere cheek either. This girl was all right.

She looked at him frowningly. 'What's your ame? Sorry, but I can never remember.'

'Penderel.' And that's the worst of being nobody particular, he thought, for you always feel a ool when you bring out your name.

She frowned at him again. 'What else? 'Scuse e asking.'

'Roger,' he told her, and thought it sounded usty. It was some time since he heard it.

'Roger Penderel.' She was obviously turning it ver in her mind. 'Look here, don't you know a oy called Ranger, Dick Ranger?'

'Lord, yes. I know young Ranger. His elder rother, Tom, used to be a great pal of mine. He's omewhere in the Sudan now, being done to a urn. Dick's not been down long from Oxford nd has developed into a tremendous West Ender. He knows all the places, stops out late, and is as

cynical as a taxi driver. He quite frightens m
makes me feel old and simple.'

'I know him too,' she said. 'He's rather a ni
boy really, bit young and silly of course. I aske
because I'm sure I saw you with him once. I kne
I'd seen you somewhere and I couldn't think wher
but now I remember. Weren't you with him o
night—three or four months ago—at the "Rats a
Mice"?'

'The "Rats and Mice"?' Then he remembere
the place, one of the smaller night clubs. 'Yes,
did go there one night with Dick Ranger. It's
little place, isn't it, with everything and ever
body jammed together. There was a band a
squashed in a balcony, just like sardines in a hal
opened tin. I remember the name of the pla
because I told Ranger it was like being inside
cheese. I hated it. The drinks were about t
worst and the dearest I've ever known.'

'Pretty rotten, yes, but not quite so bad if you'
in with the crowd who are running it. I go the
a lot, though it's not my favourite haunt.'

'Haunt's a good word, isn't it?' He grinn
at her and she—perhaps mechanically, he didn
know—wrinkled her nose in reply. 'We have
go somewhere, haven't we?'

'That's just it. That's what I always sa
She was quite eager about this. 'You can have

nce or two and a drink with some of the girls d boys you know, and the band's making a cheer- l row and the lights are nice and bright, and so u turn in there night after night and hang on, not anting to turn out and crawl home to your rotten gs.'

'I know. Once down the steps and outside the or, it's dark and raining probably and to-morrow's gun. So you put it off.'

'You've hit it in one,' she told him. And then, ter a moment's reflection, she went on: 'It's like ing in here after that.' She jerked her head wards the door. Then she lowered her voice. his seems a funny, dingy sort of hole—funny ople here too—but it's the Ritz itself after being t there.'

'Yes, I suppose it is.' He didn't want to sound bious, but he couldn't help wondering. He rned his glance on the impassive Miss Femm for moment, then looked across at her brother who as talking to Porterhouse.

'You surprise me, sir,' Mr. Femm was remark- g, though there was no surprise but something ite different flickering in his eyes. 'But then, have been out of the world, you might say, for least ten years. I never even see a newspaper w.'

'You wouldn't know it, then. Take my word

for that,' said Porterhouse. 'You couldn't com back into it. It's a different world altogether. I'v kept pace with it, so to speak; might even say I'v been in front; but it's taken me all my time.'

'The world will be very different,' said M Femm, slowly, 'when all the people have bee cleared out of it, and not before. Men and wome do not change. Their silly antics are always th same. There will always be a few clever ones, wh can see a yard or two in front of their noses, an a host of fools who can see nothing, who are a befuddled, who pride themselves on being virtuou because they are incompetent or short-sighted.'

'Something in that, p'raps,' the other admitte after a stare.

Margaret Waverton was talking to her husban Her rather clipped and very clear voice found i way across the table. 'But you'll never get Muri Ainsley to see that, Philip. It's really astonishin how people, people with brains too, can know s little about themselves. The more I see of lif the more I'm convinced that onlookers really c see most of the game.'

'So they do.' Philip's voice, dropping into meditative bass, could be heard distinctly. 'On life isn't a game, you know, and you never reall feel it is except where you yourself are not con cerned. That's where the smart saying breal

wn; nearly all smart sayings do break down
dly. Anyhow, we ought to stop talking about
e because what we say doesn't mean anything.
hat's the use of saying it's like this or means that,
en obviously it includes both this and that and
ir opposites.'

'Don't be sententious, Philip,' she told him.
ou've said that before, too. Besides, I was talk-
; about Muriel Ainsley.'

But they were all sententious, Penderel reflected,
nself included. They were settling down very
ily. They would all start boasting soon, and if
wasn't careful, he would be the first, though as
ual he would do it topsy-turvily. It was odd
w what you might call the Femmishness of the
ce had suddenly vanished—no, not vanished but
reated. He thought of the girl at his side. Cer-
nly it didn't stand much of a chance with her,
s Femmishness. But perhaps it hadn't fairly
gun yet. He had a feeling that there was more
come. There was a whole night before them and
was early yet. Why, the little band wouldn't
ve arrived yet at the 'Rats and Mice.'

Chapter Five

THEY had finished eating now a
had somehow drifted into silen
Throughout supper, all six of the
(Miss Femm had never spoken
word) had chatted easily, thou
there had been no general burst
talk; but now they were quiet. They might ha
been waiting for a signal, they were so curious
still. Then suddenly they were given one, f
Miss Femm, who had begun to seem a mere obje
turned herself into a real person again by risi
from her chair and waddling away. She said not
ing, gave no meaning glances, did not hesitate, b
simply arose and departed. From her manner, th
might have been as unreal to her as she had been
them. They stared after her in silence. If th
were waiting for a signal, it was not this.

There came a second one, this time out of t
encompassing night, which they had almost fo
gotten. It might have been thunder rolling amo
the hills, the bursting of a bank above, or anoth
landslide; the noise was distant and indetermina
and yet it was full of menace. Sharply, dram

lly, it pointed to their situation, like a pin stuck o a map. The roof and walls were no longer other sky and horizon but were roof and walls d nothing more. A little box held them all, tiny atures crouching in a dot of light. Thus dwarfed d huddled together in body, their spirits first rank to a point and then expanded in concert. ey awoke to share a common mood. The change them was as decisive as Miss Femm's exit, but had to struggle through to the surface, into eech, and so it seemed gradual, as if curtain after tain of gauze were being raised between them. Philip made the first remark and all he said was: nobody objects, I think I'll have a pipe.' That s nothing, yet by addressing the whole company he did, he made it easier for the others to speak the whole table. He brought out his pipe, Sir illiam found a cigar, and Penderel and the two men lit cigarettes. Mr. Femm contented him-f with gin-and-water.

'You know,' said Penderel, 'we ought to play a me.'

'Good idea,' cried Sir William, very hearty and sterful behind his cigar. 'Can't sleep yet. What ut bridge?'

Margaret jumped at this. 'I'd love a game.' e thought how comforting the familiar faces of kings and queens would be. No wonder old

people, surrounded by strange faces and passi
Death every night on the stairs, became so p
sionately fond of cards.

'But I've no cards,' Sir William went on. I
turned to Mr. Femm. 'Expect you've got a p
of cards you could lend us, eh?'

'I have none myself,' Mr. Femm began, 'bu
have seen a pack here ——.' He stopped sh
something came and went in his eyes, then he sh
his head hastily. 'No, there are none here. I
sorry.' It was very queer. Penderel, rememberi
looked at him curiously and began to wonder ag
Sir William appealed to the Wavertons, but t
had none.

'We'll play Truth,' said Penderel. 'It's just
moment for it.'

'So they have turned it into a game now, h
they?' cried Mr. Femm, in his thin bitter voice.
was high time they did.'

Sir William looked puzzled. 'Don't seem
know it, and don't like the sound of it. How d'
play it? Hope it isn't one of those games t
make you use paper and pencil, like so many k
at school. If it is, you can count me out. I h
'em.'

'So do I,' cried Gladys. 'Is it one of them?'

'It's the simplest game in the world,' Pend
explained. 'Indeed you can hardly call it a ga

e just go on talking but we stop lying. We
ply ask one another questions, and these ques-
ns must be answered truthfully. You have to
on your honour to answer as truthfully as you
.'

'My God!' Gladys couldn't help it, but she
pped short and then said 'Sorry!'

'This doesn't seem to be your game, Gladys,'
William told her. 'You'd better keep out.'

She shook her head very decisively. 'Not me.
on. It'll be a nice change for some of us, you
ticularly, Bill. But somebody wants to be easy
h the questions, or God knows what we shall
r.' She darted a glance across the table at Mar-
et to see how she was taking it. Not too well
arently. Serve her right.

'You two are in?' Penderel looked at the Waver-
s and they nodded. 'We're all in, then. Now,
't forget, you're bound to answer as truthfully
you can. Get down to the stony facts.'

'When you think of it,' Philip growled, look-
down into his pipe, 'the very existence of this
time, with its one rule about answering truth-
y, is an awful comment on society.'

Mr. Femm stared at him. 'But what do you
ect?'

'Couldn't say what we think all the time or
e'd—!' and Sir William waved his cigar—

'there'd be the devil to pay. Not sure how i
work even here. Still, I'm with you, and I pro
ise to tell the truth. Won't hurt me for on
D'you all promise?' They all promised.

'How shall we begin then?' asked Marga
It was queer, but she was quite eager to beg
She had played it before and had hated it—a th
oughly mischievous little game, she had thoug
But now, perhaps because she was in such an o
jumble of a company, perhaps because she
simply taking shelter here, she was more than w
ing to ask and answer and listen.

'We'll do it this way,' Penderel suggested.
pointed to Waverton. 'I'll ask you a question, t
you'll ask Mrs. Waverton, and so on round
table. That's a pleasant neighbourly way of do
it. But everyone must speak up so that we can
hear.'

Nobody objected to the arrangement. 'Ask aw
then,' said Philip. 'But don't be too hard on
Remember I'm a shy man and I'm the first in
confessional.'

'All right. Nothing too searching to begin wi
Penderel reflected for a moment. 'How's t
then? There are, you'll agree, innumerable sn
in life——'

'Oh, you mustn't talk to him about life,' M
garet broke in. 'He's just told me not to.'

You be quiet, Margaret,' he growled, but felt self warming towards her. That little charac-stic thrust suddenly and cosily domesticated n. 'Yes,' he told Penderel, 'I admit the snags.' Good. Well, then—' and Penderel rumpled his and the girl at his side laughed at him—'tell what seems to you the snag-in-chief, the great, fundamental snag. In a word, if there's a h in life, where does the catch come in? You ow me? Name the fly in the ointment.'

hilip puffed at his pipe. 'Wait a minute. That's uestion that can't be answered without thought.' puffed away again.

You see what I mean?' said Penderel. 'Of rse, you may not think there is any one great ; or catch. If so, you simply say so.'

wish I could,' Philip replied. 'I can't, though, use there *is* a catch, an enormous fly in the oint-t. And to me, it's this. It seems to me that demands so much care to be lived at all de-ly that it's hardly worth living. I'm talking it life as we see it, civilisation as it's called, not the life, say, of a Fiji Islander or a Zulu. h us the whole thing has got to be so careful, rdered, has become so conscious, asks for so h planning and safeguarding, that we never ve at any real enjoyment or ease, to say nothing heer rapture. We're like people walking on a

tightrope, and the only real pleasure we get is w
we say to ourselves, "Well, that bit's safely pass
Do you see what I mean? If you decide to
back and enjoy things, then you simply con
cropper and everything's smashed for you; bu
you're careful to avoid the cropper, it takes so n
out of you that you can't really enjoy life at
And it's no use talking about the golden mean
compromise and so forth, because if you try to w
on that principle, you only get bits of cropper,
of anxiety and carefulness, bits of cropper aga
miserable alternation. If you let things go at
disaster comes; if you don't, if you look after th
then you're simply working hard at it all the t
The trouble is that we can't trust life, and in o
to keep going with it at all, we have to be for
watching it and patching it up. Therefore the
sort of happiness we can get out of it is like
weird pleasure that some people get from ma
and altering and fiddling about with wireless
So long as we continually turn the discs and ch
coils, we can congratulate ourselves on the fact
the set's working, but that's all we can do.
can't sit back and listen to the music. There's
great snag. You all see what I mean?'

'Can't say that I do exactly,' said Sir Will
'Give me an instance.'

'Well, take a comparatively simple ma

ealth, for example. Life's hardly worth living
hout decent health, but according to the thousand
l one experts of the body, we must look after this
l that and the other in order to keep reasonably
and if we took the slightest notice of one-half
them we should be worrying about our bodies
day. Most of us don't trouble, of course, but
fact remains that most of us are rapidly drifting
ther and further away from good health and
shall soon find ourselves crocked. I'd like to
ne to a life in which I could play the fool with
body without inevitable disaster. I must have
n meant for such a life, for there's something
ide me that protests against these conditions we
w. Or, take personal relations. They ought
be delightfully easy and careless, but they can't
now that we're so self-conscious. The best of
m can't be left to look after themselves a month,
l to keep them going properly is only another
iety. By the time our relations with the people
se to us have been put in proper trim, we're in
state to enjoy them but can only find a dim sort
pleasure in the thought that they *are* in proper
n. Again, take children. Being a parent is rap-
becoming a nightmare of worry. I'm not at-
king mere crankiness now, for most of the worry
justified and that's the trouble. If you don't
ry, if you are grand and complacent, then life

will make haste to see that they suffer for it. Y
can't enjoy the children—you've no energy left
it—you can only enjoy repeating to yourself
you're doing your best for them. We've no e
and rapturous contact with things themselves;
only watch their shadows, either anxiously or
the best, with a dim sense of triumph. The
the snag, the catch, then. We've either eaten
much or still too little from the Tree of Kno
edge. As it is, we know just enough to give li
hair-trigger.' Then he looked round apologetica
'Sorry. I seem to have made a speech.'

While the others were waving away his apol
Margaret was telling herself that she had ne
heard Philip reveal himself so clearly and fu
even though he did it unconsciously. That spe
was dear old Phil all over: he didn't trust life
inch. It was a silly grumble, she told herself,
only the very nicest kind of man could have m
it. And now it was her turn. She looked at Ph
speculatively. What would he ask her?

'Your turn to ask now, Waverton,' said Pende
'And you're lucky, having a wife for victim.'

Philip looked at her as if she were a strange
son. It gave Margaret a little thrill, though
knew that it was because they were playing
game for she had noticed that look before in c
pany.

Your question is this,' said Philip, still looking her as if he had hardly ever seen her before. hat do you want? What are you getting at? iat do you want, in your heart of hearts, to do, be? What's the core of the thing for you?'

That's the sort of question a man *would* ask,' rgaret exclaimed. 'As if I had a definite object life tucked away in a pigeon-hole in my mind! l, I'll try to find an answer. Let me think.' glanced round at the eyes fixed upon her, and hed there was another woman of her own kind re, to whom she could address herself. That wouldn't understand. 'Well,' she began, hesingly, 'I'm not sure I can make myself clear whether you'll understand. The question is, at am I getting at, what do I really want to do to be, isn't it? All I can say is that I want create a certain atmosphere, which I won't atipt to define for you. It's in my mind, just as idea for a novel or a play is in an author's mind, I have to bring it outside, into life—do you ?—just as the author has. I want to bathe life lf in this atmosphere. I want to move in the tre of this atmosphere, really to be always creatit, and I want the people close to me, the ones are for, to live in this atmosphere, and other ple, friendly outsiders, to come and dip into it recognise it and tell themselves that it's my

atmosphere and very good. This atmosphere co
tains all the good things of life, all those thin
that men put into separate compartments and som
how raise above life, and because it includes the
is served by them, it's naturally more importa
than any of them.' She warmed to the thoug
now and forgot her audience. 'By doing this—
trying to do this—you're creating in the most ma
vellous way because you're using life itself as t
raw material. And the women who've succeed
in doing it—there are bad atmospheres as well
good ones, of course—are really tremendous, li
queens without the fuss and the show. Men or
notice it in a dim sort of way, though they
affected by it, of course, and you can see how t
greatest of them have been enchanted by a certa
woman's atmosphere. They've not simply fall
in love, as people always think, but they've disco
ered a new country and have stayed there. That
what I want then, to create my own little countr
She stopped, breathless, and looked round at h
listeners, feeling suddenly frightened. The n
moment there would be a huge guffaw. But the
wasn't; everybody looked either puzzled
friendly or both; and she felt relieved and rath
happy. She smiled at them: 'I seem to have be
guilty of a speech too. I apologise.'

They cried out at this. 'No apologies necessa

Irs. Waverton,' Sir William's voice came booming. 'ou're too deep for me, though. Who's next? an't we have a few facts?'

It was Margaret's turn and her neighbour was Ir. Femm. She looked at him in bewilderment. e ought not to have been included, she felt, as e stared at the long, lined yellow mask he turned her. There were deep wrinkles all round his es and the thin high bridge of his nose gleamed hite as if the bone had burst through the skin, t the eyes themselves were as vague as smoke. e couldn't ask him anything. He was as strange a mandarin. Then she suddenly remembered ebecca Femm and the dead Rachel Femm and e women who came in silks and scents and the en who said 'Go away and pray,' and it all seemed e something from a crazy old story she had just id aside, and yet this man was in it, a character me to life. No, not quite to life.

'I am ready, Mrs. Waverton.' How queer it was hear him speak. It made it worse.

'Hurry up, Margaret.' This from Philip. She as being absurd. Anything would do. 'Tell us,' e heard herself saying, 'why you chose to live re.'

Mr. Femm took a sip of his gin-and-water and placed the glass very carefully, then he peered ross the table, at the place his sister had vacated,

and compressed his thin lips until his mou
seemed to vanish completely. 'I came here,' he s
finally, 'or rather I returned here, for I was b
and brought up in this very house, for the sa
reason that brought you here. I did not want
live again in this house just as you did not want
spend a night in it. You came here for shelt
and so did I. When I decided to return, I had
money and no further prospects, if only becaus
was wanted by the police. That surprises you.
was nothing really criminal, nothing, that is, in b
taste, but the Law in this country happens to be
heavy and stupid and idiotic as the poor creature
is supposed to benefit, and Chance for once w
not on my side. This is the home of my fami
it was my home too, once, so I returned to
knocked at the door as you did to-night and
manded shelter. I have been here ever since.'
lifted his glass again while they stared at him
silence. It was not that they were struck dumb
amazement but that there did not seem to be a
thing to say. Sir William made a noise in
throat that sounded like the preliminaries of spee
but he must have changed his mind for no wo
came.

'So far, so good,' said Penderel. 'It's your qu
tion now, Mr. Femm.' But he couldn't imag
that heavy-jowled magnate, whose turn it was, te

g the truth. He was too rich, too successful, for
e truth.

Mr. Femm glanced at his neighbour and then
oked straight in front of him. 'You must tell
' he said, slowly, 'the worst thing you have done
ring these last twelve months.'

'Here!' cried Sir William, protesting. 'That's a
nger, isn't it?'

'The thing,' Mr. Femm added, calmly, 'that
u are most ashamed of doing.'

'You don't want much, do you?' He blew out
loud of cigar smoke as if to relieve his feelings.
ien he considered. 'Well, I don't know.' He
owned and looked doubtful, but then suddenly
face cleared. 'All right. You shall have it.
ie worst thing I've done this year. It's nothing
rtling. Don't expect any Sunday paper stuff,
iazing revelations, orgies in the West End, that
t of stuff. But I'll be honest with you; this
lly is the thing I'm most ashamed of. No names,
course, and all in confidence. Well, a few
nths ago I had a quarrel with the manager of
e of my concerns and got rid of him. That's
. But there's a devil of a lot behind it. I said
wasn't good enough, didn't suit me, but the fact
he was one of the best managers I'd got and a
ter man than the fellow that took his place.
d I knew it. He was just the sort of man I

wanted in the business, a real find, all over the wo
and keen as a razor. But I booted him out. Wh
I'll tell you.' He stopped for a moment, set
jaw, then laughed shortly. 'You'll probably fi
it amusing. I got rid of him because I could
stand his damned superiority. That's what
amounts to. He was only a youngster, had o
left Oxford or Cambridge a few years when
came to me. He got to be manager of this partic
lar concern in no time. I believe in rapid promoti
and this fellow was worth it. But every time
saw him he made me uneasy. Nothing in his ma
ner, at least nothing you could put a finger
But—well, I always wanted to ask him where
got his shirts and ties from; I could never find a
like 'em. That's nothing, you think, but it worri
me, made me feel uneasy. Then one day he ask
me to go to dinner, meet his wife, who'd be h
oured and delighted and so on. I went and t
settled it. There were only the three of us.
wife was very charming, very pretty woman t
and talked well. Her father'd been the Profes
of something-or-other at Edinburgh. She
obviously in love with her husband and he w
her, really in love, and I know the differen
Well, that was all right, something I like to s
in fact, though you mightn't think it, but I'm a
of a sentimentalist. They talked and they let

k, encouraged me, were almost deferential. But t superiority was there. It was the shirts and s all over again, only much worse. I felt more d more uncomfortable, uneasy, dissatisfied some- w. I tried to talk the feeling down, told 'em ne of the things I'd done, spread myself out, I knew it was just missing all the time. I ld hear my own voice going on and on, bragging no purpose; I could see myself, hot and sweating d waving my arms; and yet I knew this wasn't lly myself, you know. There was something in confounded atmosphere of these people that s making me publish a libel of myself just to ke some sort of impression on them. And the der I tried, the more I was convinced that what as saying, what I did, what I looked like, didn't ount to anything, that is, didn't seem to amount anything with these people. D'you see what nean? Of course I knew well enough, nobody ter, that it did amount to something; I don't tend to despise myself. But I couldn't get it r, as the actors say. And while I was fuming l sweating and talking big, there they sat, abso- ely easy and comfortable, so damned sure of mselves. Nothing to do with social experience, now, for I'd had as much of that as they had. had more, been to places they hadn't reached, by a long chalk. It was that mysterious supe-

riority. Well when I couldn't make any headv against it, it got on my nerves, I'd beat it sor how. So when I left them that night, I said myself, going home, "All right. I'll show y You're doing very well, aren't you? Everythir beautiful. Well, we'll see. I've made you a I'll unmake you." Within a month I'd fake lot of grievances against him, and very soon I him out. I paid for it, of course, losing a g man. It was all dead against my own intere But I couldn't rest until I'd done it. But I kr what I'd done. A damned dirty trick, weak t And that's that. Gad, but I'm thirsty.'

He accepted some of Mr. Femm's gin, the o drink on hand, hastily mixed it with water, a without lifting his eyes, emptied the glass. 'Th better,' he said, and looked around. If they dic like it, he thought, they could lump it. Anyh they had asked him and he had told them truth. He had rather enjoyed it too; this was time and place for telling these things, explain yourself for once in a while. It was all rig they all looked just curious and friendly, exc perhaps the one person he knew, Gladys. She looking a bit scornful (as she always said hersel not so friendly as the other girl, Mrs. Wavert who had seemed so cool and superior at first. then Gladys was probably not judging the

merely happened to be out of patience with
n.

'Your turn to answer now, Miss Du Cane,'
nderel told her. 'You're in this, of course?'

Yes, she was in it, and looked eagerly at Sir
lliam. 'Come on,' she cried, 'let's know the
rst.'

'So it's your turn, Miss Du Cane, is it?' Sir
lliam smiled rather grimly at her. The name
lf suggested a question to him. 'Suppose, then,
tell us exactly who you are.'

'Well, if you're not the limit!' There was real
ger in her fine eyes. 'What d'you mean by your
actly who you are"?'

The others felt uncomfortable, but Sir William
nself was not disturbed. 'Nothing in that. I
an, give us a few biographical details, the sort
thing you find in "Who's Who." Think of the
stion I had to answer. Yours is easy.' But
re was a touch of malice in the smile he gave

Gladys stared at him, pushing out her full under-
then gave a slight shrug and leaned back in
chair. 'All right then. Here goes.' But she
pped for a moment and looked in front of her
h unseeing eyes. Then she seemed to give her-
f a little shake, lifted her chin, and spoke out
kly and bravely. 'Well, to begin with my

name's not Du Cane. Probably none of
thought it really was, but that doesn't make it ea
to say right out that it isn't. My real name's H
kiss; the Gladys is all right. When I first thou
of trying to get into the chorus, I wanted anot
name, and I happened to see a book called "
Expensive Miss Du Cane." That's me, I thoug
I was only a kid, seventeen about, at the time.
lived down in Fulham, Walham Green, to be ex
just off North End Road. There were seven
us, three girls, two boys, and mother and fat
Father's a joiner, when he's working. I don't s
pose any of you know North End Road and dist
You should go and have a look at it some ti
It's not one of these absolutely poverty-stric
places, and it strikes you as being quite che
lively in fact—so long as you're half tight or d
have to live there. I used to run up and d
North End Road fetching fried fish and bot
of stout for the family, and try to make eno
to get into the gallery of the Granville, that's
little music-hall at the bottom. We'd only got
a house for the whole seven of us, and the h
itself was no size at all, and we were always
one another's way, with everybody grousing
nagging like fury. We'd one little room for
three of us, the girls I mean, and you can ima
what that was like, each of us shoving the oth

gs out of the way or borrowing them to go out
I was always doing that, being the youngest.
ggie, my eldest sister, got a job as a waitress,
a soldier on leave she liked who said he'd
ry her when the war was over. She had a baby
he never came back, and that was that. The
s at home now and Maggie's still a waitress,
ıgh not at the same place. Ethel, the one next
ıe, went to work in a laundry and then got mar-
, married to something that looks like a rat and
like one. The only thing you could say in his
ur was that he was a great change after a laun-

Then I had to go out and work, and went
ugh job after job, three months in one of those
p sweet shops run by a dirty little Jew who
always putting his arm round me, another three
ths running about in a big draper's, running
ıd from morning till night, till I was fit to
, then in other shops till I landed in the pic-
s, odd-job girl at one of the local picture palaces.
t suited me all right, and at first I thought no
of myself, but the money was rotten, the
ager got too friendly, and I couldn't stick being
ome. After I'd been an hour in that house, I
ted to scream. Every time I went up West—
e a show at Daly's or the Gaiety or the Palace
he Palladium—I'd be awake half the night.
then one night I went to the Granville with

two girls I knew and some boys, and they too
into the bar at the interval and gave us some
and some people from the show came in and w
got friendly. One of the girls had dropped
of that show—it was a revue called "Oh, my e
absolutely fifteenth rate—and I dropped in. Th
been playing at some of the little London
and were now going down into the country on
of the bread-and-dripping tours, you know
sort, All This Week in the Pier Pavilion or T
Nights Only at the Corn Exchange. I went
'em, Miss Du Cane, third from the right in
chorus of twelve. And that's how Gladys
home.'

'Ever been back since?' asked Sir William.

'Course I have. But not to live, not likely
used to look in sometimes when I was flush,
take something for mother or Maggie's kid
like 'em all and they like me. If you take
one of them away, get them into a quiet co
away from home and the others, put a drin
front of them, they come out then, you really
to know them. It's when they're all jumble
together at home, nagging and grousing and s
ing, that they get on your nerves, at leas
mine.' She looked across and met Margaret's
glance. 'But that's enough of that. I'm not g
to tell the story of my life, sir, not even to-n

n we're all lost and far from home and Picca-
y Circus seems to be somewhere in New Zea-
.'

Vell, ask a question then,' said Sir William.
your own back.' He was enjoying this and
wondering what Gladys would demand of the
er pale but bright-eyed youngster on her right,
derel, with whom she seemed to have struck
friendship at once.

ladys leaned forward and then turned her head
hat she could look Penderel almost squarely
ıe face. He was telling himself that her eyes
like very old brown sherry, when she brought
her question. 'What are you so bitter about?'
Ie!' It had taken his breath away.

es, you.' She nodded at him like a wise child.
Vhy, am I bitter?'

think you are,' she told him. She appealed to
Wavertons.

know what you mean,' said Margaret. 'It's
perhaps the exact word but it will do.' Then
addressed herself to Penderel: 'Yes, you are
r, you know.'

Of course you are, Penderel,' said Philip heart-
'You're one of the worst post-War cases I
v, a thundering sight worse than I am. Come
admit it. You're the sort of bloke they de-
ıce in little talks in Bright Sunday Evening

Services.' He grinned and pointed his pipe
across the table. 'Stand up to your question
explain the wormwood.'

Penderel made a comical little grimace. 'V
I never knew I was so obvious. I suppose I
have to explain myself. I went into the War v
I was seventeen, ran away from school to d
enlisting as a Tommy and telling them I was
teen. I'm not going to talk about the War.
know all about that. It killed my father, who
from over-work. It killed my elder brother,
who was blown to pieces up at Passchendaele.
was the best fellow in the world, and I ido
him. It was always fellows like him, the sa
the earth, who got done in, whether they
British or French or German or American. Pe
wonder what's the matter with the world these
They forget that all the best fellows, the
who'd have been in their prime now, who'd
been giving us a lead in everything, are dead.
you could bring 'em all back, fellows like
hundreds and hundreds of thousands of 'em, y
soon see the difference they'd make in the p
But they're dead, and a lot of other people,
different sort of people, are alive and kic
Well, I saw all this, took an honours course
you might say, for it was the only education
after the fifth form. Then towards the en

War, I fell in love. I was convalescent in a ntry house and it was Spring. She was staying re and every time we went out walking every e gust of wind snowed down blossom on us. never seen a place so thick with apple blossom cherry blossom. And she'd be waiting down re. We became engaged. The world was all le over again and I'd only got to see the War ough to find it all waiting for me. I thought ut nothing else, went back to France, went ough the dust and the gas of the last push in Summer and Autumn of 'eighteen, thinking ut nothing else. Then just after the Armistice, ot a letter. It was all a mistake; we weren't ly suited, too young to know then; she'd found eone else; we'd always be friends. All very onable, no doubt, but you see I'd been thinking ut nothing else. I got out of the Army, went ne and saw her once, and gave it up. But I ember I went down to the old place that Spring, nineteen, and all the damned blossom was out n, miles of it, snowing through the air as it before. It made me ache to see it. I told elf that it hadn't been there for me and only ther kind of frost would stop it. I packed my s and set off to look for work.' He stopped looked down at his fingers drumming on the e.

'Go on,' said Philip, after they had waited a
moments. For that he received one of Margar
fierce little nudges, always so surprising bec
they never seemed part of her. They belon
in fact, to the other Margaret, the one ins
This was the first he had had for some months
it was so welcome that it tingled.

'I'll cut it short,' said Penderel. 'Well, the g
fellows were nearly all gone, love was off, and
world was in a filthy muddle, but there was
work. That was the thing. I told myself
work like hell. I could have gone up to Ox
or Cambridge, but didn't want to go. I wasn'
the mood for listening to the patter of dry l
men in spectacles and then going ragging with a
of kids. I felt there was nothing a varsity c
teach me that I wanted to learn. Pure arroga
of course, but there you are. I didn't even w
to play their games, their solemn good-form ga
I'd go and work, find a man's job. There wa
African scheme going, good land for ex-offi
and all that, and so I scraped together every pe
I had and went into it and out to Africa. I w
bore you with that. It was a swindle, and a
ticularly dirty swindle, the kind that sticks in y
gullet. Africa didn't want me, at least the
I saw didn't, and I came back broke. I drifted a
town for some time and swapped drinks with o

lows in the same boat. The work idea was off I was still looking for a job, which isn't the ne thing at all though. One or two of the lows I knew joined the Black and Tans, and I rly joined myself—nobody else seemed to want —but I happened to like the Irish and I didn't e the sound of their prospective job. So I hung ut, talking over schemes with other drifters and ing too many drinks. I sold one or two things commission but found it a poor, dirty game. en I found I hadn't a bean, didn't want to bor-, so put in a spell of navvying, up North on ne public works, got the job through pure influ-e. That did me good, but I haven't the navvy perament and technique and it was about as d as a spell of penal servitude. But I stuck it we were paid off, came back to town and went nd the bars, seeing if there was anything doing. ere was—there always is, if you've got the stom- for it—but I couldn't do it. I tried to write— got plenty of material—but could only make a en hack job of it, just spoiling the stuff. Then mother died. She'd not had much to live for er father and Jim went. My one sister had rried and was out in India, and I wasn't exactly owling success as the prop and mainstay of the ily. Some money came to me. It wasn't ch and it didn't last long. I've seen to that.

There's still a little tied up but I've borrowed
the strength of that. When you've nothing
do, no aim of any kind, very few real frien
money doesn't last long. There are twenty-f
hours in every day to be paid for, bought off, y
might say. I'm one of the ugly ducklings of
War generation, the sort that will never beco
swans. Already another generation's come
who understand this world, who don't let it t
them in, kids soft enough in body and speech
really as hard as nails, all out for a damned g
time. They know what they want and how
get it, and nothing's going to take them in.
out too for a damned good time—there's noth
else to be out for, nothing left—but I don't get
And I never will.'

He looked round at the faces turned to his. I
Flemm appeared impassive, Sir William sligh
uncomfortable, and the Wavertons and Gla
serious and sympathetic. Then suddenly he star
up and broke into speech again, this time swif
vehemently.

'You think I've justified myself,' he cried to th
'I haven't really. It's cant, though not the w
kind, but still it's cant. It's weak sentimenta
merely turned topsy-turvy. I've realised
when I've heard other fellows explaining a
their slackness. It's nearly as bad as being one

se creatures who, when they get put into the k, begin snivelling about their War record. It's the first time that boys have left school to be t at, have lost their brothers and friends, have n jilted, have been swindled. If a man's got s, he ought to be able to win through. That's at you ought to tell me. I know it. I know s disillusion or cynicism or bitterness or whatever s is the new cant, an attitude, weakness trying disguise itself. And that makes it worse for . I say I ought to be able to win through, and n I ask myself "win through to what?" I don't e being in this pit, but there's no motive-power lift me out, or you might say there isn't even "out." You can put it another way. I asked verton what he thought was the great snag in , the catch in it. I asked that because I was ious. I wondered if his idea would agree with ne. But it didn't. Mine's this. If you approach in the old noble-silly fashion, then it'll simply at you and bump you badly. If you don't, if crawl into it with no grand illusions, then you'll ne to terms with it, of course, and live easily, but 'll be nothing but a pig, and it's not worth hav- at all on those terms.'

That's not unlike mine, you know,' said Philip. ly I feel I could patch up your trouble, that a mpromise is possible.'

'And that's what I felt about yours,' cried Pen derel. 'I felt it would be possible to find a saf seat somewhere between the horns of your dilem ma, but not between those of mine. Of course, i you're a born pig, you don't feel it, but if you'v merely turned piggy, it hurts for a time. I'm hop ing it'll stop hurting soon. I've turned piggy, o course.'

'You're a raging idealist,' Margaret smiled a him, 'or you wouldn't talk like that.'

'That's it,' said Sir William, complacent now 'He wants the moon.'

'No, that's wrong,' replied Penderel eagerly 'That's something quite different. I know peopl like that, but if you think I am, you've missed th point.'

'I don't know, Penderel,' said Philip. 'Surel it's really a matter of wanting better bread tha can be made of wheat, as someone once said o somebody.'

'No, it isn't.' Penderel was very emphatic. 'It worse than that. It's finding that bread made ou of wheat isn't worth eating.'

'That's the same thing,' Philip told him.

'I don't mean it to be.' He leaned forward o his elbow and frowned. 'Wait a minute and I' tell you what I mean.'

'I know what you mean.' Gladys's voice sur

prised them all, for somehow they had not expected her to speak. 'Well, if I don't know what you mean, I know what's the matter with you. You've nothing to live for. You're just passing the time and it's rotten. Everything so far's been a washout, and now it's Monday morning all the week.'

Both Penderel and Sir William opened their mouths to speak but they were drowned by a new voice that was so shrill and unexpected that it startled them all. Miss Femm had returned and was approaching the table, shrieking at her brother.

'Morgan's at the bottle again,' she was shrieking. I knew he'd begin to-night. Where did he get it from?'

Mr. Femm bit his lips. 'He did not get it from me. Can't you stop him?'

'There's no stopping him now. He's there in the kitchen, stupid already. I'll take these things away, the rest can stop where they are.' And she bore away the remains of the joint and the cheese.

The others pushed back their chairs and rose to their feet. That entrance had obviously put an end to their talk, during which they had seemed to be sitting on a bank, watching life go by like a river and pointing out to one another its eddies and ripples and gleams; but now, with the opening of a door and the sound of another voice, life

seemed to be roaring round them again; they wer
in the river.

Miss Femm was back again. 'If he goes o
he'll have to be watched,' she screamed. 'It's ge
ting worse outside too. We've not done with
yet.' She departed with the bread and the butte

Sir William felt he wanted to do something. H
turned to Mr. Femm. 'Who's this fellow, Mo
gan? Your man? Is he as bad as all that
Couldn't you tackle him about it, tell him to g
to bed?'

Mr. Femm, who did not look happy, shook h
head. 'I have seen him once or twice like th
before. Being little better than a brute, he is ver
close to Nature, and these upheavals have a ba
effect upon him and then he takes to drink an
that makes him worse.'

'Could I tackle him?' Sir William looked ma
terful. 'I'm used to dealing with some pretty toug
customers. He's the big rough chap I saw at th
door here, isn't he?'

'He is. Very big, very rough, very strong.'
tiny smile crept into Mr. Femm's face. 'He
also dumb.'

'Dumb!' Sir William was taken aback. Som
how he couldn't see himself trying to reason wi
somebody who was dumb.

Mr. Femm nodded. 'Very strong, very stupi

d dumb. I said he was very close to Nature.'
e nodded again and then walked away. Sir Wil-
m stared and began to whistle soundlessly. This
llow was as odd as his servant. He joined the
avertons at the fire.

Chapter Six

FTER they had all risen from t
table, Gladys and Penderel fou
themselves standing togeth
There were several yards and t
width of the table between them a
the others, who were close to t
fire. This isolation was accidental but they were
no hurry to put an end to it. The mood of cand
and revelation had passed, leaving them rather s
and awkward with one another, but something h
been carried over from that shared feeling. Th
faces were still strange but their feet were on co
mon ground.

Gladys looked about her and gave a little shiv
'Glad I'm not here alone,' she told him. 'T
place'd give me the horrors.'

Penderel was curious. 'D'you mean absolut
alone?'

'No, I didn't really. I meant just with the p
ple here.'

'The Femms?' He hoped that that was w
she did mean.

She met his glance and nodded. 'Yes. Ther

nething a bit queer about the man, but that little woman, with the voice—there's something about . . .' She finished the sentence by wrinkling nose.

Penderel hadn't troubled himself much with the ught of Miss Femm. 'She's probably a harmless creature, though she certainly does remind one a slug.'

Gladys kept the wrinkle on her nose for a few ments more, then let it go and smiled. 'What's time?'

He couldn't tell her. 'Sorry. No watch.'

Fancy a man without a watch!' she cried, though thought seemed to please her. 'But I never e one neither. Can't be bothered somehow. y don't you?'

I hardly ever want to know how it's going— time, I mean; and if I do, there's always some- y ready to tell me. Some people never seem hink about anything else. I don't think I like ches and clocks. We ought to go back to hour- sses and sun-dials, things that deal with time etly and don't for ever pester you with their y seconds to the minute.'

She seemed to be looking at him rather than lis- ng to him. 'You're a funny boy,' she said at . 'I expect you've been told that before.'

Was this something real, only defeated by

language, or was she becoming heavily arch? 'N
I haven't,' he replied lightly. 'I haven't been to
anything for ages. I've been spending most of
time with men, and men, you know, never s
things like that, never really tell you anythi
about yourself.'

'I can tell you something about *myself*,' she sa
making a droll little grimace.

'What's that?' He put on a look of mo
gravity.

She curved a hand round her mouth. 'I'm dyi
for a drink.'

'So am I,' he assented, heartily. 'This conf
sional business has made me thirstier than ev
Well, what about a drink? There's some gin l
there.'

'Ugh! Not for me. I've not come to moppi
straight gins yet. That'll be the last act. Y
wouldn't like to see me soaking gin now, wou
you?'

He admitted that he wouldn't. And he mea
it. It was curious how the idea revolted him. I
had a quick shuddering thought of gay and i
pudent youth, of something that deliciously h
the balance between the urchin and the woma
rotted away: a mere trick, of course, of associatio
but nevertheless very curious.

'Isn't there anything else?' she went on. 'C

sky now, and I'd face the rest of the night cheer-
y. Sir Bill there, the greedy pig, swallowed all
had as soon as we came in. If you want to know
those men make so much money, that explains
They're greedy pigs.'
enderel looked at the table and rubbed his chin.
with you about the whisky. But there's none
.'
Well, it's a damn shame, now isn't it? Why
't you carry a flask?'
He stared at her and suddenly struck his left
n with his right hand. 'Why,' he cried, 'what
ool I am!'
Of course you are.' She made a mocking little
. 'But what's the big idea?'
I don't carry a flask as a rule, but I had one
lay. I'd forgotten all about it. You can hardly
eve it, can you? But it's true. I had one, I
one, full of good whisky. I remember having
little drink out of it, when we started off again
after dinner.'
What about it, then?' she asked him. 'You're
going to be a greedy pig, are you? You're not
ng to tell me now that little girls oughtn't to
k whisky?'
Don't be silly. I'll go and get it and we'll
e what there is, just the two of us.'
That's the spirit.' Then her face seemed to

change a little and now she really smiled at h
'Just the two of us. We don't want Bill in thi
he doesn't deserve any either—and the others w
want any. Where is it?'

'In my raincoat pocket, I suppose,' he repl
'I'll go and see.' He went over to his coat but
turned, shaking his head. 'It's not there. I m
have left it in the car, somewhere on the seat.'

Her face fell. 'If that isn't just my luck. Wh
the good of having a flask out there. We c
start climbing over rocks and wading through riv
to find it.'

'But this car's here, just round the corner,'
said. 'You're forgetting that. I can easily slip
and get the flask.'

'Of course,' she cried. 'I was thinking of
car. Just a minute then, and I'll come to the d
with you. I'll put my boots on first.'

'Have you got a torch?' he asked. When
discovered that she had, having carried Sir W
liam's through the darkness, he continued: 'W
if you let me have that, I can get the flask i
minute. No need for you to bother yourself,
know.' But he hoped she would.

When she returned, wearing her boots and
and carrying the torch, she said: 'No, I'll c
to the door with you. It'll be something to
and perhaps we'd better have our drink there.

ked your friend—Mrs. What's-her-name—
erton—enough for to-night. Besides, Bill will
anting to butt in.' The others were clustered
d the fire and were paying no attention to
n. Gladys was eager to go, to do something.
ould be a little adventure. She didn't want to
l there, waiting for him.

hey left the big door open behind them and
l at the top of the three steps outside, sheltered
n the rain by a small porch. The night was as
k as ever and still roared gustily, and the light
n behind only showed them a gleaming slant of
and pools in the sodden gravel. For a minute
o they made neither movement nor sound but
ly stood close together, looking out. Some-
it was as if all things had narrowed to one
ous rim.

ive me London,' said Gladys, her mouth close
is ear. 'London every time. You never see
ght like this there. It never seems so bad.
! I'd get the horrors here. And, mind you,
struck some rotten places in London, but you
ys feel you've only to make a little dash for it
everything's all right, there's the lights and
ouses and policemen just outside. But look at

We're probably cut off altogether by this time.'
lerel found the idea attractive. The five of

them were shipwrecked. There had come at
a break in the smooth and dreary sequence of thi
He hoped they were cut off at least for a few ho
'According to these people here, it's happene
least once before. The house itself is all right
it might easily be impossible to get away from
But it didn't look impossible though, and
couldn't help wishing the evidence were pla
He didn't want everything to settle down agai

Gladys surprised him by touching at once
core of his thought. 'You're rather pleased a
it, aren't you? Anything for a bit of excitem
your motto, isn't it?'

'Perhaps it is,' he replied. 'But I hope you're
going on to say that you've met my sort be
That would make me very angry. I like to t
I'm original.'

She reflected for a moment. 'No, I've me
sorts, and some were a bit like you but not re
very like. You're different really.'

'Now that's a compliment,' he cried. 'Not
like being different. You're different too.'

'Of course you'd have to say that, wouldn't
She turned her head to look him in the face.
eyes seemed enormous in that strange half-
of the open door. 'But you don't really believ
I know.'

You don't know.' This was silly stuff, but he an odd desire to tease her.

Yes, I do. You shut up,' she retorted, quite nly. 'Run away and get that flask. Where's car?'

Just round the corner here somewhere.' He ed his left hand. 'It's in a shed or coachhouse something and won't be locked up. Can I bor- the torch?'

She handed it to him. 'I'll wait here for you.'

Right you are,' he cried. 'I shan't be long.' hurried away and a moment later she saw the t from his torch vanish behind a corner of the se. Three or four minutes passed for her in ind of dream, in the very centre of which, far oved from the darkness and the rain, there ned to be something comforting, warm, glow- It would be fun when he came back with the k. The drink didn't matter much—though she missed the whiskies-and-sodas that most eve- gs brought, and felt a little uncomfortable, un- ain of herself—but she liked the idea of the two them, just them and nobody else, sharing that k, making a kind of cosiness together in the dle of this awful night. There was something ut this boy . . . she felt she understood him. had remembered him from that one night he 'Rats and Mice.' He hadn't remembered

her, hadn't noticed her. That was nothing. S
wasn't so sorry about that. He had had a lot
drink, was nearly tight, but not red and gogg
like most of them, but pale, with very bright ey
all strung up. He wasn't the usual sort. He did
care much about girls, but was one of those w
went round drinking with other fellows, play
cards for money all night, and talked and talk
about the War and books and politics and all th
very clever and very funny. They'd think he w
happy, they'd know no better; she could alm
see and hear them, a lot of men talking and laug
ing, silly babies. That girl had done it for hi
or begun it. She found herself wondering wh
that girl was like. Tall and fair, little head, hi
voice and snobby accent, cool sort of stare, twen
guinea tailor-mades as 'these old rags' for t
morning stroll, one kiss if you're a good boy—sh
be that kind, rather like this one here he'd be
staying with, Mrs. Waverton. But he wasn't
love with this Mrs. Waverton, wasn't even int
ested, she could see that. Perhaps that girl was
the same kind. And anyhow, what did it matt
what was she being so silly about? It was ti
he was back.

Then something happened. The little light
patch of night, with its gleam of falling rain a
wet ground, at which she had been idly staring

e last five minutes, was suddenly blotted out, and ere was nothing but darkness before her. The orway was all dark. The lights in the house ust have gone out. It was all so sudden, so unex-cted, so noiseless, that for a moment or two she s completely bewildered and rather frightened. ıen she heard voices raised indoors. They would telling one another that the lights would have be attended to, that the fusing or whatever it s would have to be put right. The lights would obably be on again in a few minutes. She had d she would wait there. If she went in now, e might spoil it all. She would stay where she s.

It was queer, frightening, though, standing there the dark and not knowing what was happening. e could at least peep in, just to satisfy herself. ıere was a very faint firelight creeping through e doorway now. She could hear voices again, and otsteps, now a loud voice—that was the fat, deaf man, who must be quite close. She had been ring irresolutely at the darkened doorway, but w, having determined to look into the house, e moved a pace or two forward and to the right. ıd she moved another step the heavy door would ve flung her back bodily, but as it was she stopped t in time. Actually it did not touch her but it med to have been banged in her face.

She was so startled that the crash left her diz
leaning against the door for support. It was
if someone had dealt her a blow. No gust of w
could have banged that great door into its pla
somebody inside had shut it; and she was loc
out. And now it was darker than ever, and all
could hear was the noise of the rain, a dism
frightening, lonely sort of noise.

Why didn't he come back with that flask? W
didn't somebody remember they were out and o
the door? It had only been shut by a silly accid
She would knock and let them know she was th
But even when she made up her mind, it seem
as if her muscles would not obey her at once,
that she hesitated for some time, with one ha
resting on the door itself and the other re
clenched for the knocking. She grew impati
with herself. What was the matter? A rap
two would settle it. Yet when she did knock at l
it was hurriedly and rather timidly, like someb
dubious of the fate an opened door would bri
She waited a moment and then knocked again,
time with more confidence.

Nothing happened. The massive door loo
as if it were closed for ever. The noise of
rain returned with greater insistence, and the nig
the immense black wet gulf of it, seemed to cl
round her. What had happened in the hou

nat had become of Penderel? She couldn't wait
him any longer, everything had suddenly be-
ne so queer. If she stood in front of that door
other minute, she would want to scream and
ter it with her two fists. He didn't know these
ngs were happening, and he was only round the
ner. She would go and find him.

It was a relief to do something, even though
neant splashing through the darkness. She made
that corner of the house round which Penderel's
ht had disappeared, but when she had groped
way to the other side of it, there were no signs
any sheds or coachhouses. There was, how-
r, some sort of light on the left, and she hurried
vards it, imagining for a moment or so that she
l found Penderel. But no, this was still the
use itself. The light was shining through an
curtained window on the ground floor. She went
rer and saw that the light came from a solitary
dle and that someone was sitting in there. Could
s be Penderel? No, it was not. She approached
window more cautiously now, and peeped in.

The candle was on a bare table and it showed
the figure of a man sprawling there, with a
tle of brandy and a glass before him. It was the
ge dumb man she had seen when she first came
the man they said was drinking, Morgan. She
ld not see him very distinctly because the win-

dow was streaming, but she received a vivid if fa
tastic impression of his humped shoulders and ha
flushed face. His head was rolling a little fr
side to side, and he put one great paw on the ta
to steady himself. He looked as if he had reach
the brooding stage, and very soon, she thought,
he didn't fall asleep, he would turn nasty. S
had seen them before—usually with two or th
policemen hanging on to them before they h
done—and he was obviously that sort and such
huge brute too. He would need about four poli
men if he turned nasty. They ought to have lock
him in that room, which seemed to be a kitch
Perhaps they had, though. Now she saw him l
his head, and she felt a sudden stab of fear as
appeared to turn his eyes towards the windo
But she reminded herself that he couldn't see h
and she stayed where she was, watching him, f
cinated. Now he had rolled to his feet and w
looking about him. He moved forward for a f
paces and then stopped, swaying slightly and app
ently muttering to himself. Obviously he had
reached the legless state as she thought he mi
have done, for he moved with some confidence,
he was drunk, there was no doubt about that, bro
ingly and dangerously drunk, ready for misch
and worse.

She turned away, dazed after looking at the lig

l groped her way round the next corner, feeling
t and cold now and apprehensive. Where was
nderel? For a moment she was completely be-
dered by the total darkness and splashed on help-
sly, like someone lost and blind. But she heard
noise coming from the right somewhere. It
nded like a horse moving in its stable. She
ssed on vaguely in the direction of the sound
l seemed to approach a long black bulk. These
st be the coachhouse and sheds he had men-
ned. Yes, there was a glimmer of light further
ay on the left. She hastened towards it, heed-
s of the pools through which she had to splash,
l a moment later found herself blinking in the
lden full glare of the electric torch. She had
nd him.

'Is that you?' she called, halting.

'Hello!' came his voice, and she hurried forward.
was just coming back,' he went on. 'Sorry to
ve been such a time, but first I couldn't find the
and then I couldn't find the flask. I looked all
nd the back seat, then at last remembered I had
sed it to Waverton and he had put it down
l forgotten it, and it was on the front seat.
ry to have kept you waiting.'

She was hardly listening. They were in a kind
shed, and she was at his side, leaning against

him, breathless. She felt all weak now. 'Hal minute,' she gasped, and straightened herself.

He put a hand on her arm, and with the oth hand sent the light of the torch circling round t shed. 'Hello, what's wrong?'

She waited a few moments. It didn't seem mu now. He would think she was being silly. 'No ing much really,' she told him. 'Only it seem so funny. While I was standing at the door, wa ing for you, all the lights in the house sudde out.'

'That's nothing,' he interrupted. 'They've be jumpy all the time. I've been expecting th This home-made electricity's always going wro and a night like this just asks for it.'

'All right, Mr. Wise Man. I thought of t too. But there's some more. Just after the lig went out, the door was banged in my face. I v locked out.'

'That's queer certainly,' he admitted. 'Perh the wind though . . .'

'No, it wasn't. Then I knocked, but nobo came. I was fed up standing there, waiting for y so I set off to find you, and on the way I s that man Morgan in the kitchen, fighting dru Phew.' She blew out her breath. 'I want to down.'

Of course you do,' he cried. 'You want a drink
Well, then, inside or out?'
What do you mean? If it's the drink, I want
side.'
He turned her round and flashed the light for-
d. There was the car, which had been backed
the long shed. 'We can perch on the step or
ning-board or whatever they call it, or we can
inside and be snug and talk it all out over the
sky. Just a minute,' he added, moving forward.
switch on the lights to make it cosier. Only
dims though, because it's Waverton's electricity,
mine. There you are.'
We'll sit inside,' she decided.
Right you are. Front or back?' he enquired,
ing and waving a hand towards the two doors.
he laughed. He was turning it all into fun
n. 'Oh, the back!' she cried. He held open
door and she climbed in and settled herself
ily on the cushions. He sat down by her side
began to unscrew the flask.
o they've shut us out, eh?' He was pouring
whisky into the little cup. 'Well, that's nothing
, is it? We're always being shut out.'
'm not.' She took the cup he offered.
He laughed. 'Aren't you? I am. Drink up,
then begin at the beginning and tell me all
t it. Wait, though, I'll have a drink first. I

don't suppose there's anything in it, I mean
business of the lights and the door, of course,
there might be, there's just a chance. If there w
it would be something horrible. Well, I drink
health, Gladys.' He drained the cup. 'I hope
don't mind my calling you that, as between fe
adventurers, you know, shut out, lost in the c
draining the last flask.'

'No, I don't mind. I like it.' She felt w
now, snuggling in the seat and with the tiny
of whisky somewhere inside her; and she fo
herself leaning against him a little, discoveri
certain comfort in the suggestion of his neighb
ing solidity. 'But what do you mean by your so
thing horrible?' she went on to ask. 'Are you tr
to frighten me?'

He was more serious now, though not ent
so. 'No, I'm not. I tell you I don't suppose th
anything in it. But, I repeat, if there wer
would be something horrible. What I mea
that this house we've crept into out of the
might be all right—that is, so far as we're
cerned, just for to-night, we'll say—and prob
will be, but it's very queer and if it goes wrong
go wrong very badly. I feel it in my bones.
off the track and there'll be something hellish
loose. You see, I've been brooding over it a
and I know more about it than you do.'

ou're making it up,' she cried. 'You don't
any more than I do. You're trying to work
up into something very exciting, just to pass
ime. I know you.'
erhaps I am. But listen. To begin with,
's old Sir Roderick.'
Who's he?'
xactly, who's he? You've never heard of him.
he's in there. He's the master of the house
y and was once tremendously important, but
w very old and infirm and is somewhere up-
, invisible and ungetatable. When you come
ink of it, he's rather like God.'
e pinched his arm. 'You mustn't,' she told
and meant it. It wouldn't do to say such
gs a night like this. He was worse than she
and she would have to hold him in. He didn't
to resent the pinch and she let her hand stay
e it was, loosely grasping his arm.
hen there's woman Femm,' he continued.
've seen and heard her. She might break out
here. I'm not sure now she didn't frighten
garet Waverton. There's Morgan. You've
seen him——'
have,' she broke in, with conviction, 'and I
to God they've locked him in.'
here's man Femm, those bones that have
ed the police. I wonder what he'd been doing,

by the way. Now the queer thing about him is
he's terrified, absolutely jangling with fear
something or somebody in the house. I noticed
and he said he was afraid of Morgan get
drunk ——'

'If that's what it was, I don't blame him.'
was very emphatic.

'But it wasn't, that's the point. I'm positiv
wasn't. It was something, somebody else. In
house too. Perhaps it's Sir Roderick, who ma
a kind of old horror.'

She tightened her grip on his arm. 'Th
enough of that. I want to be able to go back th

'All right. But you ought to have been tel
your tale. Now you begin and when you've
ished, we'll go back and see what's really happen
He sank a little lower in his seat and rested
head on the cushions. She began her story of
lights and the door, and as she spoke her h
gradually slipped down until at last her cheek
resting against his sleeve. Throughout there
at the back of her mind the thought of that g
closed door and the surrounding darkness and
rain that could still be faintly heard beating ag
the roof of the shed. But there was a
roof of their own, the car's hood just a
their heads, between them and that other roof,
they seemed to be in a queer tiny room, smellin

her and petrol, that lodged them warmly and
urely in the very centre of the night, just the
of them, talking so easily together. She wanted
give herself a shivering little hug—just as she
d to do when she was a kid and the curtain went
at the theatre—and she hadn't felt like that for
ng time. It was queer how excited and happy
was inside, simply because the two of them were
re talking about strange things and all the time
ing their own strangeness away.

Chapter Seven

T HAD looked as if Philip
going to plunge into an explana
as if they were going to have it
together at last. They had dr
away from the others and
standing near the fire, intent u
one another. They ought to have begun as
as that curious talk, which had pretended to
mere game round the table, had come to an
Indeed, their eyes had begun, Margaret told
self, and then admitted that it was mean of he
have left the actual cold plunge into talk to Ph
Poor Philip was so dreadfully handicapped.
he wasn't too proud to talk to her properly—
she was sure the night had withered away all
the merest husk of pride in both of them—he
still shy. Why had she stupidly waited and
squandered the precious moments in chatter?
it wasn't really chatter, nothing they said now c
be called that, but it wasn't the talk they wan
Their eyes condemned it. Eyes were doing
everywhere, watching in despair the world b
chattered away.

ıen it had seemed as if he were about to begin. ıad tightened his lips for a moment and that liar little frown had appeared. How well she that look! There had been times too—and weren't pleasant to think about now—when ıad hated it, had turned away and had allowed faces (Murrell smiling down at her, the sickly —how could she have been so silly!) to come ng into her mind. The little speech that had wed that look on his face had seemed to con- her judgment. He had said, very gravely: you understand what I meant when I was ıg at the table, Margaret? It was important, know, I mean important for *us*.'

ıere was everything in that plural. Of course ıad understood. As if she didn't know him, every twist and turn of his mind, so anxious, dering, honest, yes, gloriously honest! She waited a moment before replying, but only to out the right words so that she could get the of them really launched. And then, before she spoken a word, it had happened. The lights gone out. It was as if the house couldn't leave alone. She was just finding her feet in it, queer experience in that horrible room with Femm was just beginning to look like a mere of nerves, everything was settling down into ıcy and friendliness, and now the light was

gone. At first they seemed to be in total darkn
but it was soon partly dispelled by the dull g
from the fire. Now she stood among shadows
faintly crimsoned cavern.

The fuss that followed was rather welcome
did at least keep the house at bay. The men be
shouting to one another about fusing, and sh
circuiting and accumulators. Philip, who knew
about these things, offered to try and make
lights work again, but Mr. Femm seemed to th
it was hopeless. Margaret didn't listen very c
fully, being content that their loud cheerful vo
filled the darkness. But when Sir William str
a match and held it up and there was talk of cand
she remembered the one she had brought back w
her from Miss Femm's room.

They lit this candle and put it on the table,
then they all drew a little closer and looked d
on its tiny wavering flame. At this moment, M
Femm marched in upon them, carrying ano
lighted candle.

'You've got one, have you,' she yelled at th
'Well, look at it. It's guttering. There'
draught.' She looked round the room. 'The do
wide open.' She went over and closed it wit
bang. Then she returned to the table, put d
her candlestick, and let her little button eyes
from one to the other of them.

Look here,' cried Sir William, heartily, 'isn't
e anything else we could have, a lamp or some-
g? Not much of a light this.'
What's that?' Miss Femm screamed, looking
er brother. He explained in his curious hissing
e that always contrived to reach her ears.
anwhile, Margaret seemed to hear a faint knock-
but as no one else appeared to hear it, she
ught she must be mistaken. Then Miss Femm's
e drove all thought of it from her head. You
dn't think of anything else the moment that
nan opened her mouth.
Let them have the big lamp then,' she was say-
Miss Femm always talked about them to her
her as if they weren't there. 'There's oil in it.
used it the last time the lights went out. We
t have some light down here, and not just to
se them either. There's Morgan remember.
and get the big lamp, Horace. You know the
'
He stared at her, his face an edge of bone in the
dlelight. Then after a few moments' hesitation,
tammered: 'Yes, I—I think so. I cannot re-
nber where it is though. You get it, Rebecca.'
Not I!' she cried. 'Too big for me. And if
don't know where it is, I'll tell you; though
know as well as I do. It's on the little table
he top landing.' Her voice rose to a scream of

savage derision. 'You know where the top land is, don't you? You've heard of it, I dare say. Y can perhaps believe there's a top landing, e though you do believe so little. Well, it's up th next to the roof.'

It was strange that Mr. Femm should seem agitated. It wasn't the mere screaming that upsetting him; he frowned his resentment at th yet he was still hesitant and disturbed. 'I remem it now. Yes, the big lamp. It is very heavy, heavy for me.' He shook his head. 'I coul carry it down all those stairs.'

'You mean you're afraid to go up there alo she screeched, pointing a finger at him. 'Well, not going up, I've enough to do. You go with hi And the finger was sharply turned until it poin at Philip.

Margaret jumped and felt like crying out t Philip shouldn't go, but then suddenly realised would be making a fool of herself. Why shoul he go? Yet she was half alarmed, half annoy when he nodded across at Mr. Femm. 'Yes I'll with you, of course, and help to get it down.'

'Get it myself, if you like,' Sir William put looking from one to the other.

Philip grinned at him. 'No, I've been cho and I'll go. We'd better have one of these cand hadn't we?' He took up a candlestick, gav

ing glance at Margaret, and moved a few paces
ward. Mr. Femm joined him at the foot of the
s, was given the candle, and then slowly led
way up. The others stared at them in silence,
it was not until both the men themselves and
jigging shadows had disappeared that anybody
ed away or spoke.

want this,' cried Miss Femm, laying a hand
he remaining candle.

Margaret exclaimed in protest against being left
ie dark for even a moment. Philip's queer little
had somehow left her shaken, and now she
rded Miss Femm with positive hatred.

Must leave us a light, you know,' Sir William
ted. And he gave Margaret a friendly glance,
to suggest that he knew what she was feeling,
ance for which Margaret, who hadn't expected
vas instantly grateful. 'If you're going,' he
t on, bellowing cheerfully, 'you must leave us
Can't sit in the dark.'

reply to this, Miss Femm, surprisingly
gh, produced from the grey fat folds of her
a kind of smile. 'It would do you good to sit
ie dark,' she told him, 'but I'll see. I can't go
t in the dark and I'll have to find another for
elf.' She fumbled in the bottom of the candle-
and found there an old candle-end, which she
nd held before her as she waddled away to

the door that led into the corridor. The other
watched her for a moment and then settled th
selves in front of the fire.

'I think I'll try a cigarette,' said Sir William,
ducing his case. 'Will you have one?'

She didn't really want to smoke but she took
because it would help her to feel easy and c
panionable. Their being left alone together
the fire and the candlelight all combined to sug
quite definitely if not strongly, a certain intim
You felt you ought to begin talking of someth
very personal and important almost at once.

Sir William blew out a column of smoke, lea
back in his chair, stretched out his legs, loo
about him, and then remarked easily: 'Not
cheerful, is it? What's become of Gladys and
other chap, Penderel? Funny I never missed
Are they wandering about the house somewhe

She replied that she wasn't sure. They m
have gone out. He doesn't seem to be bothe
much about his Gladys, she told herself. Wh
queer relationship! She felt suddenly curious a
it, about him too, and stared across at his h
face.

'We're a bit dictatorial with these people, w
you come to think of it,' he mused. 'Don't k
that I'd like it. Though we've every excuse
course.'

know. If they were ordinary sort of people, ould say we were behaving very badly. But 're so queer, aren't they?' And then she sud- y thought how horrible it would be if he stared er in surprise and blandly contradicted her. It ld only need a touch like that, she felt, to throw off her balance.

e only smiled, however, and there was com- in his hearty rejoinder, for there seemed to whole sensible world behind it. 'A bit mad, ould say,' he replied. 'Both of 'em. They get that, living in these places, miles from any- re. Just imagine year after year, with many many a night like this, and hardly seeing any- . I know, because my own part of the world's like this.'

he took the cigarette out of her mouth and ed her astonishment. 'Why, I see you against ckground of telephones and cars and express s and offices and factories. Nothing like this.' low, yes. But not always. I came originally a little village in East Lancashire on the of the moors. A few miles away from where ed to live it's as wild as this, and you get some r folk—people—up there.' She seemed to the flat Lancashire accent creeping back into oice. 'I still go back sometimes. They tell me

what they think of me up there. I've a bro
and sister there yet, living in the same old way
She didn't know anything about these pec
but she remembered certain Scots novels. 'I
don't make a fuss of you, I suppose, because yo
now an important person and have made a lo
money?'
He laughed. 'Well, this is the way it wo
They respect the money but not me. They
about money up there, know what it's worth,
don't pretend to despise it. Now in other pla
particularly in the South of England, they
tend they don't care about money and they
pretend to think a lot about me, who happen to h
plenty. The other's the best way, though I d
think so when I'm there and they're putting
through it.'
Margaret couldn't resist it, he seemed so will
almost anxious, to be communicative. 'How
you come to make such a lot of money? I m
how did you begin?'
He looked across at her with thick, raised br
'That's a queer question.'
'I'm sorry, it's rather a rude question, I kn
But it's a question I've always wanted to ask so
one like you.'
'Oh, I'm not offended, don't think that,' he c
leaning forward and then settling himself r

fortably in his chair. 'It was queer because I ɔened to be thinking about the very same thing.' stopped and looked with half-closed eyes at the

Margaret, released from her curiosity for a ıent, wondered what Philip was doing. He was ng time returning from that mysterious top ing. But was he though? No, he had only gone a few minutes. She returned with a to her companion, who had suddenly lifted his l and was now looking across at her. 'Would really like to know?' he enquired.

ıe nodded. 'Yes, I'm really curious.' If it to be a tale of high finance, Philip would be before it had hardly got under way. But she dn't help feeling that it was going to be some- g more personal, for even in that dim light she ıed to recognise on his face that plunging look h men put on when they were about to unbur- themselves.

Unless you're very lucky,' he began, 'you only e money by wanting to make it, working hard he time, not bothering about a lot of other gs. And there's usually got to be something art you off, to give you the first sharp kick. r you've got really started, brought off a few s and begun to live in the atmosphere of big ey, the game gets hold of you and you don't any inducement to go on playing, d'you fol-

low me? It's the first push that's so hard, w
you're still going round with your cap in your ha
It's my experience there's always something ke
a man going through that, puts an edge on him
starts him cutting, and it may be some quite li
thing. A man I knew, a Lancashire man, too,
an easy-going youngster, thought more about cri
than his business, until one day, having to see
head of a firm, he was kept waiting two ho
sitting there in the general office with the cl
cocking an eye at him every ten minutes. H
told me this himself. "All right," he said to h
self, "I'll show you." He walked out when
two hours were up, and that turned him, gave
an edge. He did show 'em, too. I don't say
course, that every man who says something like
to himself brings it off, but some do. Well, it
the same with me.'

'What was it then that made you so ambitio
And Margaret looked at him speculatively.

'It was a cotton frock,' he said, quietly.

She stared and hastily smothered a laugh;
viously he was in grim earnest. He reminded
of a big brooding schoolboy. 'Tell me what h
pened,' she said softly.

'All right, I will, though I don't know wh
should,' he remarked. Then he changed his t
'Just after I left school, I got a job in a cotton o

Ianchester. I met a girl when I was twenty very soon we were engaged. Couldn't get mar- for a year or two because I hadn't enough it on. At last they told me to leave my desk start going on 'Change, in other words pro- d me and gave me a good raise. That was gh for us, we got married. We hadn't much ey, but what we had gave us a very good time. s in love and very happy then. I wanted to ell at my job and kept my nose down to it dur- vorking hours, but forgot all about it at night t the week-end. Still, I wanted to get on, and wife encouraged me. Well, I was promoted , this time to the London office, with more nsible work and another raise. We were ex- about that, I can tell you. I can see us now, ng all our things packed—not that that took ng—ready for the great move. We found a flat, very cheap, near Swiss Cottage, and Lucy y wife—slaved away cleaning it up and I ed her when I came home at night, and we ved ourselves I can tell you, though we'd no ds and nobody hardly spoke to us for months. it was London and we felt we were getting nd we were happy together. We managed to d the money out, and we'd have dinner in once or twice a week and go to the theatre, e pit. It was a bit lonely for her but she didn't

mind it at first. We'd soon find our feet, move
in fact. I bought a dress-suit, my first.'
stopped, stared at her, and cleared his throat.
don't suppose you want to hear all this. D
know why I'm bothering you with it.'

'Go on, go on. I want to hear it,' she told h

'Well, I'll make it as short as I can,' he went
'One of the directors gave a party, and we w
invited. This was the great event. We felt ev
thing was beginning for us. They were takin
up. You can just hear us talking it over, Lucy
nervous and excited, hoping to make a good
pression for my sake. Well, I put on my dress
and she made herself as pretty as a picture. Du
the evening I didn't see much of her. I was am
the men most of the time, talking business, ma
the most of the opportunity. Once or twice I loo
across and gave her a smile and she smiled b
but I thought she looked a bit forlorn. I was
of it all going home, but she was very quiet, t
I thought. Then when we got to bed, I preten
to go to sleep but I heard her crying. Wh
asked her what was wrong, she said she was t
got a headache. As a matter of fact she ha
been feeling too well, so I left it at that. B
noticed she never mentioned that party. T
was another a month or two afterwards, but
wouldn't go. She'd a good excuse then becaus

time she was really ill. Within a year she was
. But I found out what was the matter that
. She let it slip. She'd only had a cheap
n frock on (it looked pretty enough to me,
I knew a bit about dress goods) and the other
en there had let her know it. She was a little
ncial nobody in a cotton frock and they didn't
et to let her see it. She'd had a wretched
ng, had felt snubs and sneers in the air all the
It kept coming out later, when she was weak,
delirious. I remember sitting by her bedside.
He stopped and looked down into the fire.
argaret waited, afraid of marching briskly into
reverie of his. At last she moved a little in
hair and he looked up. There was just light
gh for her to see his face tightening.
hat did it for me,' he cried. 'Up to then I'd
the nice honest decent little servant of the
pany. Well that was finished. They couldn't
a poor little nobody in a cotton frock, all eyes
smiles and nervousness, a friendly word or
couldn't they! I told myself I'd put them
rags. I was mad, but it put an edge on me,
g me up as if I was a fiddle-string. Going
to that empty little flat night after night dur-
he first year, I swore to myself I'd spend the
f my life beggaring every woman who'd been
at party. Couldn't do it, of course, but I did

what I could. Before I'd done, I took a lot of ton away from some of those fellows and pil on the backs of their women. Within three y I'd wrecked that company and walked over t biggest competitor. That started me. wouldn't think I was sentimental, would you? that began it. And it wasn't hard because there nothing for me to do but to make money. I d even want to spend it at first, nobody to spe on, and didn't want to enjoy myself or take it not with that cotton frock stuck in my throat.'

He rose from his chair and kicked a log into its place on the fire. Then he stood loo down at her, his massive face very clear in candlelight.

'You'll hear some tales of me, probably h 'em already. I'm one of the rudest of the self-made men. I've no respect for char hostesses, nice ladies whose husbands could do a bit of capital, or dainty aristocratic girls wouldn't be above marrying a man twice thei if he happened to have bought a title and ow few factories and ships and a newspaper. Th tell you that, and they're right. I keep my re for the young men's wives who turn up in c frocks. I suppose a man's got to be sentim about something, and that's how it takes me.

ed many a year's dress allowance into an en-
pe. Queer, isn't it?'

largaret murmured something but she hardly
what it was, for she was troubled by a vision
factories and ships and crowded offices, and
ist this background there stood out the figure
his man, no, this huge resentful boy with his
y commonplace little romance, someone lost,
smiling, now crying, in a tiny flat, one of
sands, nearly thirty years ago. She stared at
He had never really grown up. Were they
ike that, these men who grabbed power, who
ked whole countrysides, who sent other men
g all over the world? Once again she seemed
he beneath the sudden pressure of life. It was
Philip returned. Why didn't he come, bring-
he lamp? She felt lost herself in this queer
. The very look of that single candle, pointing
e shadows, made her ache.

Chapter Eight

HAT'S that?' Sir William held his hand. 'Didn't you hear so thing?'

Margaret leaned forward in chair. 'I thought I heard a n a kind of distant rumbling.' rose to her feet, and they stood together, lis ing. Their eyes were empty, but in their ears the whole vague tumult of the night.

'Nothing much,' said Sir William at 'Storm's still going on, I suppose.' He thrus hands into his pockets, and began whistling so

There had been so many things to think a that Margaret had almost forgotten the storm crumbling hills and the floods outside, the old r ace of the night. Their journey through it, arrival here, these events had crept away from foreground of her mind, had thinned and f a little. Now they returned, conquering her r in one savage rush; the walls and the roof be mere eggshell; and the night was about to in its rain and darkness. She stood there pre

so heavily upon one foot that the whole leg
ut and dully aching, and still she listened.
ere was more distant rumbling, then at last
e crash, coming from somewhere above and
d the house. 'I wonder what that was?' she
ooking at her companion.
mething went then,' he exclaimed. 'More
coming down now, I suppose.' He went over
window, rubbed it with his forefinger, and
to peer through. 'Can't see a thing. It's as
as pitch.' He continued to stand there, with
ce close to the window. 'I'll tell you what,'
id, after a minute had passed, 'I can hear
hing though. Sounds like rushing water, tons
ons of it. Come here and listen.'
joined him at the window, which looked out
back of the house. There was a noise of
g water coming from somewhere, not a loud
yet very disturbing, suggesting the presence
gigantic hostile power. 'Is it coming down
?' she asked.
round us now, I should think,' he replied.
ably finding its way in.'
, the house was an eggshell perched on the
le. There was no security anywhere. This
ht angered her; she felt as if she had been
d.
won't bother us,' Sir William was declaring.

'Only keep us indoors here, and anyhow we
want to go out.'

She hastened to agree, and told herself n
be so foolish. A foot or two of water, a few
bling rocks outside, a little space of darkness
was all and what were they? The trouble r
was, she ought to be asleep, dreaming. There
a fancy that it was the dreaming part of her,
awake and active, that was taking hold of
experience, turning it into queer stuff, flashing
ful lights upon it. They were now both dri
away from the window, going back to the fire a

The opening of a door behind turned
round. Could it be Philip at last? No, it was
Femm. She came in with a candle in one hand
with the other outstretched, a finger pointi
Margaret.

'You opened it, didn't you!' she screamed
cusingly. 'Well, you can go and shut it no
and shut it. I can't. No time to lose either.
down on us, coming in too, I expect, in the c

Margaret couldn't find a word. She felt r
sick. Sir William however, took charge o
situation. 'What's this?' he called, with some
ness.

'The floods of course,' cried Miss Femm.
around us.'

s, I know that,' he returned. 'But what's this opening and shutting?'

y window.' She pointed to Margaret again. must have opened it, and now she can shut 'm being swamped out.'

rgaret found her voice. 'I'm sorry.' Then rned to Sir William and lowered her voice. afraid I opened the window in her room. s what she means.'

that all? Well, I'll go and close it for her,' plied, to her relief. 'All right,' he shouted, ng to Miss Femm. 'I'll come and shut it.'

ss Femm nodded in reply, keeping her mouth y closed and fixing her little eyes on Margaret ong evil stare. Then she went over to the through which she had just entered, the one ed into the corridor that Margaret knew, and t open. Sir William walked towards it, then d and looked back at Margaret. 'Shan't be he told her. 'Your husband ought to be back hat lamp in a minute or two.' He went out, ved by Miss Femm, who banged the door d her.

was a desolate sound. Nor was the silence came so swiftly afterwards any more com- g. There dripped into it the thought that as now alone. The shadows, thick in every of the big room, lit so feebly, despairingly,

by the solitary candle, crept nearer to tell he
she was alone. It was only for a minute
though. Any moment might bring Philip
those stairs. She walked slowly over to the
of the staircase and stood there looking up
the gloom above and listening for his foo
She heard something, a vague noise, it might
been someone talking or moving about up
Was it Philip and Mr. Femm? And if not
was it and what had become of them? There
creaking somewhere. Was it on the stairs a
She glanced round the hall and then had a su
impulse to run upstairs and find Philip. It
be better than staying there alone. But wou
She might miss him; he might return some
way, down another staircase at the back, and
her gone; and she might be wandering abou
stairs. Who knew how big and rambling the
might be! She saw herself creeping down st
dim corridors. No, she would remain wher
was. And anyhow, Sir William would return

She wandered back to the table and looked
on the candle-flame. Idly she held one hand
it and began twiddling her fingers, watching
play of light and shade. Then she saw the sh
they cast, a dance of uncouth crazy figures, sa
leaping in the smoke of a ceremonial fire, an
brought her hand away and remained quite sti

moments, feeling very small and desolate. she grew impatient, first with herself and with everybody else. Why had they all stolen leaving her alone? Her mind swayed towards son. There came gibbering into it the fancy he was the victim of a plot, that all the others een deliberately spirited away by Miss Femm, would lock them all up and then come creeping o lay a toad-like witch's hand upon her. For ckening moment she could feel that hand, but xt instant the whole fantastic web was broken. s and a too eager imagination were playing lse again, playing false indeed to life itself, gh which there ran the unbroken cord of ; they were lying and treacherous, betraying ind back into primitive darkness. You go , they whispered, it's easier. Thought came dy her, and things shifted back into a rea- e shape and colouring again.

was ridiculously impatient of course, she erself, swelling every second into a minute, ll it was queer how long everybody seemed away. And where were Penderel and that ladys? They must be together, of course. os they had tucked themselves away in some of the house (somehow the idea made her er), or they might possibly be outside.

thought steered her towards the door. She

would have a look at the night. Even if n
had returned by the time she came back fro
door—and that was improbable—a peep o
would at least make things easier by contrast, v
banish the desolation of the room, give it a su
tion of warmth and security. She opened the
and peered out. At first there was nothin
darkness and a rush of sweet cold air in her
Then the light of the room, dim as it was,
through and her eyes began to sift the dark.
were still noises coming from a distance, the s
she had heard before, but these only form
vague tumultuous background for other and
curious sounds, near at hand, all watery sou
kind of mixed lapping and swishing and splas
She leaned forward and looked more closely.
was little or no rain now, only a few drops
spattering in the rising wind. But what wa
faint curved gleam below? She peered dow
saw that two of the three steps from the doo
disappeared. Then she understood, though i
difficult to say how much her eyes actually
But that was water that darkly shone and l
and swished and splashed there below. Sh
looking out upon what was virtually a river
lake. The flood had come pouring down
them, had rolled round the house (and wa
haps filling the cellars this very minute), a

had risen to a sufficient height to cover the
ps. It was besieging them. She was stand-
the edge of a little island. Involuntarily she
ack and swung the door a little further for-
but did not close it. Fascinated, half lost in
m, she still stared out, her fancy deepening
rk water every moment until she brooded
hole drowned valleys.
n suddenly she went cold and stiffened.
ody was standing behind her, very close. For
ent or so, she did not move, and there came
her, in one crazy flash, that vision of Miss
which tormented her before. It was she
vas standing there, malignant, corrupt, a

re was a shuffling movement and the sound
vy breathing. She had no need to turn and
ow. It wasn't Miss Femm, it was Morgan.
at hand came uncertainly over her head,
d the door she held, and began closing it;
uld feel his hot breath; he was brushing
her; there came a sickening animal warmth,
smell.
quick desperate twitch of her whole body
e was free. The door crashed to, with all his
upon it, and for a moment he remained
leaning against it, a breathing hulk. She
trembling, only a yard away, and stared at

him. She wanted to cry out, but she dug her into her palms and remained silent, asking h frantic questions. He was drunk, of course, a said he would be. Had he been simply tryi shut the door? Yes, that was all. She had to keep quiet, to be calm, dignified, and he be gone in a minute.

Without another glance at him, she w slowly across the hall towards the fire. I extraordinary how far it seemed. Her back with little shivers. But it was all right; he go away, and somebody would be coming soon somebody would be coming. She had reache table now and the candle burning there gav confidence. What was he doing? She turn see, narrowing her eyes. The dim light sh him to her still standing there, a vague sha first, but then she saw that he was no longer le against the door but had turned round to fac Was he looking at her? The blur of his fac her nothing, but she felt sure that he was s across at her. It would have been less terri if she could have seen him clearly, but that mass, that dark hulking shapelessness, like thing monstrous spawned by the shadows, app her. Was he moving forward or merely swa And there was not a sound; nobody was co The whole world was suddenly empty and ho

s, he was coming towards her, there could
mistake about that now. She saw him lurch-
orward gigantically. She wanted to run away.
ıe had stopped again, and was swaying there
wo or three yards from the table; and she
see him clearly now, could see his hair and
ing beard and even his little sunken eyes, and
vas something for faint comfort, for he did
ıst become a person again. Desperately she
ıerself it was only Morgan, the servant here,
stupid creature. Why should she stand look-
him like that? If she took no notice of him,
ould probably go away. She turned a shiver-
ıck upon him and walked slowly across to the
side of the fireplace. Then she faced about
ly. He too had moved and was now standing
e she had been a moment before.
hat do you want?' she cried, shakily. Her
sounded so feeble that it only emphasised her
ıess, her loneliness. And what was the use?
vas dumb. If only he hadn't been dumb, she
she could have done something with him.
s little eyes dwelt upon her, as if in answer to
uestion. Then he raised a hand lumberingly
is mouth seemed to gape into a grin.
e held herself tightly. 'Go away,' she cried
and stared at him. He did not move but
an uncouth noise in his throat. There came

with it that smell again, rank from a huge unwa
hairy body. If he could only say something, h
ever foul, it would have helped her to control
self. But this sickened and terrified her.
trying to look self-possessed, she moved away a
with wincing little steps, this time round the
hand side of the table, thus keeping it between t
She would go towards the stairs. Philip wa
there somewhere and might be coming down
moment.

She could see Morgan out of the corner of
eye. He was still standing there, watching
Now she was turning away from him, facing
bottom of the stairs. There was a noise behind
Had he moved? She quickened her pace and
now within a yard of the lowest stair. He
following her; he was very near. Then she
a little shriek for a hand fell upon her shou
twisting her round. A great arm swept about
and there was a fleeting nightmare of a low
hairy face, a suffocating hug, heat and stench
huge sliding paws. She threw herself back, st
gling wildly, sickeningly, beating upon the arm
held her, wriggling desperately in his grasp.
sharp tearing—the top of her dress ripped—
she was free, stumbling backward, gasping.
loomed above her, but now she summoned all

ngth, darted blindly beneath the outstretched
, contrived to scramble up the first few stairs.
Philip, Philip,' she called with what breath re-
ned to her. Oh, where was he, where was he?
e stairs heaved and trembled; her hair fell in
nt of her eyes, which saw strange flashes of
ıt; there was a roaring in her ears; but he was
ning after her now and she clutched at the ban-
rs and pulled herself up and up, half falling
then recovering herself at every other step.
was there grunting behind her, only a few feet
ay. The stairs now curved into darkness, and in
noment she would be at the top. Something
ed her voice at last, breathless though she was.
ilip, Philip,' she called, and now the cry went
ging through the dark. 'Philip,' it went ringing
in, sending her terror and her need clamouring
ough the upper rooms and landings, the black
ce into which he had disappeared. He was
re somewhere and he would hear.

Chapter Nine

FOLLOWING Femm upstairs le ample time for reflection. H seemed to move not merely slow but with downright reluctance, as he were climbing to the scaffol Philip was telling himself that felt a durned sight better. He had Penderel (a the house itself too, perhaps) to thank for th because it was that outburst of confidence round t table that had done him good. To begin with, had let off steam himself, which made an immer difference. Then Margaret's answer to his questi had told him a great deal. In fact, he had thoug of trying to put things right—led on by the go old Come-now-Philip look in Margaret's cle eyes—when the confounded lights went out a eyes and all disappeared. Then too, the others h rushed in to give themselves away, and that h been a warming and heartening kind of expe ence. The night had redeemed itself. If you c put yourself right with people, he announced himself, the rest doesn't matter; the roof can f

And a serious young architect couldn't put it
nger than that.
o far he had been climbing funereally in Femm's
low. Now they had reached the top of the
flight of stairs, and his guide had come to a
and was holding the candle above his head,
he were inviting the architect in Philip to look
nd. There wasn't much to be seen, but Philip
ed curiously and suddenly found himself inter-
d. He turned to examine the panelling at his
w, and Femm brought the light nearer.
Seventeenth century?' he asked.
That was when this house was built, or at least
e of it,' Mr. Femm replied, and seemed anxious
emain where he was and to volunteer further
rmation.
hilip nodded to all that was said, looked about,
hed things. Everything there was magnifi-
ly done but had been wickedly neglected and
now in a ruinous state of decay; it was a sight
went to his heart. He thought he understood
why the house had depressed him at first,
re he had picked up the idea of an evil desola-
for everything told the same sad tale, and no
ot downstairs he had quite unconsciously taken
ll this. Treated with anything like decency,
house would have been a joy, a miracle. Now
stood there holding a candle to a fallen em-

pire of craftsmanship. A not unpleasant mel
choly, touched with autumnal beauty, invaded
mind. He wanted to talk about it to somebo
to Margaret.

They moved slowly down the landing, past s
eral stout old doors. The last of these Mr. Fer
tapped with his forefinger. 'This is my room,'
said, halting. 'There are some things here t
you would like to see, I imagine.' He looked
Philip almost wistfully.

'I've no doubt I should,' Philip replied, '
not just now, if you don't mind. We've got
get that lamp, you know.'

Mr. Femm lowered the candle and then m
use of his other hand to stroke his long chin.
looked most fantastically bloodless, brittle. '
yes, the lamp.' He stared at Philip for a mome
then pushed his face forward a little. 'Why sho
we bother about the lamp? We have been l
enough away now. We can go back and say t
we cannot find it or that it was too heavy for us
that it is broken. They will have to believe
Why should we trouble about the lamp?' He sp
very softly but with even more precision th
usual.

Philip looked at him in amazement. What
the matter with the man? 'I don't see the poi
he began, then broke off and changed his to

ing rather indignant. 'Besides, we couldn't hat. We said we'd get the lamp and we'll get Why shouldn't we?'

Why should we if we don't want to,' said Mr. m, calmly. 'And I don't want to. Are you id of telling a few lies? If you are, I will it upon myself to tell them.'

t's not that, though I must say I don't like g. And in this case, it would be particularly n.' But Philip couldn't be angry, it was all so rd. He never remembered a more absurd con- ation—the two of them standing there in the e glow of candlelight at the end of the land- arguing about a tiny errand they had un- aken.

must say, if I may do so without offence,' Mr. m mused, 'that for a man of culture, as you e just proved yourself to be, you are singularly e. Perhaps you have religious convictions, like sister. Perhaps God is on your side.'

No, I've not,' Philip replied, shortly. He was nning to be annoyed. There was something nsive about the man, a queer unpleasant streak im that could hardly be dismissed as eccen- y. But something came to break his thought. llo, did you hear that?' he exclaimed. It was fled cry from somewhere, and there came with kind of battering noise.

The candle dipped and shook, and in its wav
ing light, Mr. Femm, who had started back, look
more ghostly than ever. He answered Phili
stare with hollow eyes. 'I did hear somethin
he said at last.

'I should think you did,' Philip returned.
was rude, but he couldn't help it. 'What was it?'
demanded, bluntly.

The other leaned forward again. 'It must ha
been Morgan. That fellow is drunk, as you kn
He is probably making a disturbance in the kitche

The sound had not come from the direction
the kitchen, but Philip couldn't very well pur
the topic, although his mind had not dismissed
They were wasting time. 'Well, what about
lamp?'

Mr. Femm bit his lip and then looked apologe
'Listen,' he began, 'I want you to excuse me fr
accompanying you. I am tired and I am not stro
I cannot face any more stairs. I should have t
you before, but vanity—the vanity of age—wo
not allow me. You know where it is, I belie
You will find it on a small table nearly at the
of the next landing above—' he pointed—'at
top of the stairs there.'

The man was so obviously lying that Philip co
have laughed in his face. His excuses were sh
impudence. There was something very strange

is, but there was nothing to be done about it.
right. I see,' he said, looking him steadily
e eyes. 'I'll go and get it. I suppose,' he
d, remembering his companion's objection
stairs, 'it's not too heavy for me to carry?'
ot at all,' came the reply. So that had been
too. The man was made up of them. What
traordinary shifty, spectral creature he was!
's what's the matter with him, why I haven't
him from the first, Philip told himself: he's
n liar himself and he makes everything, yes,
hole world, seem hollow and false.
shall want that, you know.' And Philip held
is hand for the candle. Mr. Femm begged
to wait a moment and disappeared into his
. When he returned he was carrying a burn-
ight-light and, without a word, he now handed
the candle and remained standing at his door
Philip hurried forward to the foot of the
staircase.
e was not half-way up when he heard the
d of a door closing behind him. Evidently
Femm had retired into his room. And the
moment there came the sound of a door either
bolted or locked. It seemed as if Mr. Femm
determined to feel secure. It was all very
ge, and Philip stopped to tell himself so and
en again. Somehow he didn't like the sound

of that door. It was odd how a little thing li
that could leave you feeling uncomfortably ins
cure yourself, almost as if you were left naked. H
went on, but now he trod very lightly on the stai
They were narrower than those below, uncarpet
and given to creaking long after your feet h
passed over them. In the moving glimmer of ca
dlelight everything here looked very uncared f
and melancholy. Above his head was a little bla
skylight where the rain went rap-rapping. It w
a place of dust and mildew and long decay,
things forgotten by the sunlight, as strangely r
mote as some house, fragmentary, shadowy, in t
dark of a dream.

Here was the landing before him, and ther
nearly at the end of it, were the little table a
the lamp. To examine them coolly was to di
perse the fairy-tale dusk that had somehow gather
in his mind as this absurd little errand had lengt
ened out and become touched with fantasy. T
lamp was one of those old-fashioned doubl
branched affairs, its twin glass cylinders cover
with dust. With care, he ought to be able to car
it down in one hand. The light of his candle fe
on an old steel engraving hanging above the tabl
and it showed him a bewhiskered officer standin
sword in hand, in front of a large cannon, wh
in the background there towered a quite impossib

agoda. For a moment he stopped to gaze at this nknown, evidently a hero of one of the old Chi-ese wars, and to wonder how he came to be there, ith his sword and his cannon and his pagoda. Then e took up the lamp, held out the candle at arm's ngth, and returned, more slowly and carefully ow, along the landing.

He had been in such a hurry to discover the ble and the lamp that he had never noticed that oor on the left. Now, as he walked slowly back, invited his attention, then arrested it. There as nothing very odd about its appearance; it was erely a stout old door that had lost most of its int; but there was something very odd about the ay in which it was closed. Then he saw what was. The door had two large bolts. It was stened on the outside. Why should they have one that? Did they suppose someone would break to the house that way? The very idea of any-ne breaking into this house was monstrous. Pon-ering these things, he had actually passed the door, hen something pulled him up. He seemed to hear mebody moving about. Surely there was the und of a voice too, a kind of muttering not very r away? It could only come from behind that oor. There was somebody inside that room, the ickness of a wall away from him, behind that olted door. And what about that stifled cry he

had heard a few minutes ago, that battering nois
Curiosity, like a little flame in the mind, burn
and brightened for a moment and then sudden
went out, leaving him in a crawling darkness, wi
doubt and terror. He felt suddenly sick and ter
fied of life.

Yet he had not halted a minute when his ea
seemed to catch another cry, this time from belo
out of another world. Margaret. Surely that w
her voice calling his name? Or was it that old tri
of memory, a phantom call? There was silen
now and he moved forward, but doubtfully. N
there was no mistake. 'Philip, Philip.' All
her in the cry, and a terrible urgency. Still m
chanically clutching at the lamp, with neither ha
free to balance himself, he rushed down the stai
miraculously without falling; and immediately th
feeling of mental sickness and terror vanished a
a curious kind of anger stirred in him. He'd le
her confident and smiling, and now even she
been dragged into it. It couldn't leave even h
alone. His mind, outracing him, found an oppo
ing presence, an enemy, but no name for it; a de
sity of evil, something gigantic, ancient b
enduring, only dimly felt before, but now taki
the mind by storm; it was working everywhere,
the mirk of rain outside, here in the rotting corne
and without end, in the black between the sta

argaret never seemed to understand about it, t now it had made her understand or she wouldn't calling like that. He'd been telling himself it s high time she did understand, but as he hurried now to find her, the thought that it had got at her ile she had been waiting, smiling there, below, used him to fury.

As soon as he reached the lower landing, he has- y set down the lamp and ran forward. There s a flash of blue, a flying fair head, and she was nging to him, her hands grasping the lapels of coat. She was battling for breath. 'Morgan— unk—got hold of me—coming now' was all that could catch, but it was enough. The next mo- nt the man himself, incredibly hulking in that ht, had appeared, but he stopped short, a few rds away, when he saw the candle and the two them standing there.

Margaret swiftly turned her head, then tugged his coat. 'He's there. Let's get away from him.'

Philip shook his head, gave a quick glance round, en fixed his eyes on Morgan's dark bulk. 'There's doorway just behind us,' he told Margaret. 'If comes on, get behind me and stay in the door- y. There'll be plenty of time to run after- rds, if it's necessary.'

'Let's go, Philip. I'm terrified of him.'

He watched Morgan steadily. The man was

swaying a little, but otherwise he made no mov
ment. 'He's probably drunk himself silly and
only wandering about aimlessly. Are you sure
was after you?'

'He followed me round downstairs,' she whi
pered fiercely. 'I was all alone. Then he caug
hold of me and when I escaped he followed me
the stairs.' He could feel her trembling. 'Le
go now. We might find the others.'

'I don't know where they are.'

What was Morgan going to do? Philip watch
him with anxiety, for the fellow was obviously
strong as a gorilla and was probably half-craze
and Philip, though he was fairly tough and w
at least sober, was by no means confident that
could stand up to the brute, let alone overpow
him. He didn't even know what exactly he wou
do if Morgan advanced. He hadn't used his han
on a man for years, though there was a time wh
he had known how to box. Nevertheless, he was d
termined not to turn his back on the man, not
budge. The anger that had been so curiously fir
in him on the way down still remained. Whatev
the man may have done already, he still seemed
mere foolish lump; but if he changed to anythi
worse, Philip would oppose him whatever it co
And anyhow Margaret could easily escape, cou

n downstairs—not upstairs, to that landing above, that room.

If he comes on,' he whispered, 'and you want to ape, slip past and run downstairs. Don't get.'

Her eyes met his for a second. 'I shall stay re,' she said, very quietly. She was composed w. 'Let me have the candle.' And she took it m him, moving a little to one side.

Morgan shuffled his feet and then suddenly ched forward.

'Stay where you are,' Philip called, sharply. hat do you want?'

He contrived to pull himself up. Then his great ggy head came forward and they could see his s, fixed in a stare. As if in reply to Philip's stion, he made a gobbling noise in his throat l slowly raised a hand until it pointed at rgaret.

There was something overpowering in the very gueless bulk of the man, and his approach had ken Philip at first, sending a flash of fear through his nerves. Run, run, run, they screamed. But s amazing gesture, this raised and pointed hand, angered him that his nerves were immediately stered. He extended an arm and gently pushed rgaret so that she stepped back into the door- y behind him. The light she held fell on

Morgan, but left Philip shadowy. He watche those little glassy eyes, now turned from Margar to him; and leaning forward slightly, balancin himself upon his toe, he waited.

Nor had he long to wait. Something flared u at last in Morgan's dull brain. Suddenly his arm pawed the air and he hurled himself upon Phili This blind rush was Philip's opportunity and h leaped to take it, throwing all his weight behin one straight hard punch. Crack!—it went hom full in that lowered rushing face. Philip recovere himself and instantly stepped back, to be out o reach of those great arms. But for the moment h was in no danger. Only his sheer bulk had save Morgan from being felled by the blow, which ha been well-timed and had found his jaw; and eve as it was he was sent reeling back. Philip did n follow up his advantage but remained where h was, at once bewildered and exultant, on the d fensive. Perhaps that punch (undoubtedly whacker) had knocked some sense into the brut who had finished staggering back and was no gropingly bringing his hands to his head. He fe Margaret's hand on his sleeve and turned to smi at her. She was standing pressed back into th doorway, and in the light of the candle she w holding she looked very pale and shining-eyed.

se in front brought him sharply round again. d he was only just in time.

Morgan had charged like a bull and was upon n. He had just time to raise his arms and tighten body when the man's whole weight was flung on him and he found his arms gripped by those ge hands. All was lost. Instinctively, how- r, he immediately twisted his arms so that his nds clutched at Morgan's coat sleeves, then he d on tightly, his arms rigid, and instead of trying withstand the charging weight of his opponent, ckened his whole body. The result was that he not go down but was rushed backward, past rgaret and down the landing, just as if Morgan re carrying him. It was a dreadful sensation, s of flying helplessly backward, but he contrived keep his wits. So long as he was not actually ne down, with Morgan's weight upon him, so g as one of those hands had not found its way his throat, it might be still possible to master s brute, who seemed as gigantic but as brainless a prehistoric monster.

He had found his feet again. This was the ment. He relaxed his grip for a second, brought arms down and then threw them upward and ward with all his strength. Morgan was not ck enough to retain his grip and Philip was free hrow himself backward. He went further than

he intended, crashing against the wall, because
he moved a blind swing of Morgan's clenched han
as big as a mallet, caught him on the side of th
head, nearly turning him sick. But the light w
very dim here and Morgan's own bulk now blotte
out most of it. He didn't seem to know exact
where Philip was, and when he charged again, h
moved straight forward. Philip threw out a le
and, as Morgan went flying over it, summoned a
the strength left to him and aimed a savage swing
ing blow at the man's body, a blow that lande
somewhere in the ribs and completed his destru
tion. There was a great thud and with it th
sharper crash of broken glass. Morgan was ther
measuring his length on the ground, and in his fa
he had smashed the lamp that Philip had put dow
not so many minutes before. That was the end
the lamp then; and the end too, he hoped, for
time of Morgan, now a dark unstirring shape.

Philip leaned against the wall, triumphant b
dizzy and sick. For a moment he did not mov
but then tried a few faltering steps towards th
light. His head ached and this narrow pla
couldn't contain the loud beating of his heart. On
more he leaned against the wall, and now he clos
his eyes, desiring nothing but to be a breath in th
darkness. But the light, coming nearer, forced h
eyes open again. It was Margaret. Her arm w

ut his neck, her cheek pressed against his, and re came back to him, bringing a multitude of hing little images from a life long lost, the scent her hair. 'It's me, Phil,' she was saying. He embered that, too. It had come back with the , across a desert.

Her fingers were moving gently across his face. e you hurt?'

He opened his eyes very wide now and shook head. 'No, at least, nothing much. Just one g. I was very lucky though.' He smiled at and then looked down at Morgan, who was still g there, motionless.

he followed his glance. 'He's not—not dead, e?'

He took the candle from her. 'No fear. Prob- hardly stunned. He went down with a fearful ck but he's obviously a tough subject and there's bably nothing wrong with him. Let's have a k at him.' He held the light above the out- tched Morgan, who was stirring a little now and thing heavily, and Margaret came peeping over shoulder. 'He's only knocked himself out,' lip told her. 'He'll be conscious again in a ute unless he happens to fall asleep; and it's e than likely that he will fall asleep, because very drunk.'

Margaret raised her eyes dubiously to his. 'Suppose he—begins again?'

'He won't. Don't worry about that.' Philip took her arm and began moving away. 'When he comes to his senses, he won't remember anything and he probably won't be fit for much, anyhow.'

Margaret tightened her arm against his fingers. 'I can't imagine how you did it, Phil.'

He laughed. 'That's obviously the right remark and just the right tone of voice, my dear. You caught the note of pride. Well, I can't help feeling rather like Jack-the-Giant-Killer. And, as a matter of fact, *I* can't imagine how I did it either.'

They were walking slowly back along the landing now. Suddenly Margaret stopped. 'Listen, Philip. You see that room there, the door where I was standing?'

'Yes.' What was this? The dark house closed round him again.

'There's someone in there, a man I think. When I was standing there I heard him call out, in a thin weak voice.'

'Femm's in one of those rooms,' he told her. 'He left me and carefully locked himself in. But it's the one behind, not this one.' His mind was back on the landing above now, before that other door; it seemed a place in a nightmare. Should he tell Margaret about it? No; at least not yet

distinctly heard somebody. He seemed to
t something. It must be that other one.'
What other one?' He had forgotten who was
, feeling lost for the moment in a maze of
m-like corridors that offered nothing but mys-
us doors and voices crying in the dark.
The oldest, the one they called the master of
house, Sir Roderick,' Margaret whispered.
n't you remember, they said he was very old
ill? I'm sure he wanted something. And
k of him lying there, hearing all that noise,
e helpless perhaps.'
es, this must be old Sir Roderick, whose house
given them shelter. And what a house, what
ter! He looked at Margaret doubtfully, and
at the door itself. They were standing in
t of it now, and its rubbed panels shone a little
ne candle light.
Listen!' And Margaret's hand went up as she
ed forward, her white shoulder curving through
blue silk where her dress had been torn, her
a medallion of bright gold. His heart went
to her as he listened. She turned her head,
eyes seeking his. 'Did you hear that?' she
pered.
He nodded, then raised his brows in an un-
en question. There had come to them, as if
n across a great space, the sound of a voice

calling within, the tiny weak voice that Margar
had described. He read her decision in her fa
and felt no surprise when he saw her hand cre
forward to the door and tap-tap upon it gentl
Her other hand sought his arm and rested the

'Come in.' Their ears caught it as their ey
might have picked out a point of light on a mi
night sea.

Margaret hesitated, and Philip felt her ha
squeezing his arm. He put the candle into h
other hand, leaned forward and slowly opened t
door. His shadow went wobbling into the roo
he went after it, and Margaret followed him.

Chapter Ten

THEY were still sitting snugly in the back of the car, and now the talk had drifted round to Sir William Porterhouse. Gladys was determined to explain about him, rather to Penderel's alarm, though he added to himself that he felt curious.

'Of course I like him,' she was saying, 'or I didn't go away with him. You can depend on it. But I'm just about as much in love with him as I am with old Banks, the door-keeper at the Scala. I'm not going to put on any airs with him—we're through with anything like that, aren't we? And that's funny too, when you think we've only just met.'

'Yes, but we met in the middle of a black night,' told her. 'And that makes the difference. It's damned lonely putting on airs a night like this. And then there isn't much time.'

'How d'you mean, there isn't much time? There's plenty of time. There always is.' But she was more rather than puzzled. He must mean that he

wouldn't be seeing her any more after this, a somehow she had expected he would be, quite a l

'I don't know what I meant,' he said. And didn't, now that he came to think of it. It w just a queer spurt of emotion, feeling all thin rushing by them. 'I think I must have meant t usual poetical Preacher stuff: we're like flowers th are fresh in the morning and withered in the ev ning; you must know the sort of thing.'

'Oh, that!' She dismissed these antique fanci with hearty contempt, all the more hearty becau she felt suddenly relieved. 'That's only tr about looks, when you're bothering about your fa and figure. But it's not true about anything el is it? Everybody I've ever met had more time th they knew what to do with; even old Bill there with all his cables and telegrams and private secr taries and rushing about—has more gaps than knows how to fill; I know that. Those old fello —they read 'em out in church, don't they?—mu have really been Beauty specialists.'

'Perhaps they were—in a way,' he put in, refle tively. 'But what were you going to say, befo you began about not putting on any airs?'

'Oh, yes. About me and Bill. Well, it real boils down to this. It's been a convenient arrang ment for both of us. As I said before, I like hi and he's helped me a lot, given me a pretty goo

There's been nothing regular about it, you
; no little flats and all the rest of it; he's
aken me out when he's felt like it or when I've
ike it, and we've had a few week-ends away.
is the longest and the farthest: I was down
is one from the start, but he was desperately
wanted a day's golf at Harlech. If he was
ome of them I've seen and heard of, not gone
with, though—for ever pawing round you
very smarmy—there'd have been nothing
. But what he really wants—most times any-
—is just somebody to be with, to talk big to at
r or late at night. He likes to sit on the edge
ed, boasting a bit to round off the day. He's
y really, for all his talk. He ought to have
ed again; his wife died when he was young
e hasn't forgotten her either. You can guess
retty soon. I've weighed him up.'
can see the balance in your hand,' said Pen-
. 'It's terrifying, but go on.'
ow you're making fun of me,' she cried. 'I
t tell you any more.'
was queer, Penderel thought, how simple she
e as soon as she talked directly to him, al-
childish, whereas every time she spoke about
ing else she surprised him. 'You must go on.
t to be terrified, and I only wish Porterhouse
hear this. It would open his eyes, though

he's by no means a complacent fool about himse
judging from that little anecdote he told at t
supper table. Tell me some more about him. Bl
the masculine gaff.'

'Another thing about him is this. I fancy i
true about a lot of men too. When he asks me
go out with him or to go away with him, it's n
so much that he really wants me there.' S
stopped for a moment to think it out. 'What
really wants is not to be wanting somebody, d'y
see? And that's not the same thing, is it?'

'Not by a thundering long chalk,' he told h
'There's all the difference in the world betwe
'em.'

'Well, that's how it is, mostly, with him. H
wants everything, you see, or thinks he does; and
he was by himself, knocking about town or stayi
at some swell seaside hotel, and he saw a lot
smart and pretty girls drifting round, he'd be
mad as blazes because he hadn't one. He would
be able to eat his dinner for thinking about it. B
if he has one too, there with him, staring him
the face if he cares to look across, it's all right the
And he's got somebody to show off and somebo
to explain himself to and boast to, later on. Tha
where I come in, then. You see he happens to thi
I'm rather smart and fairly pretty. Probably y
don't.'

'My dear Gladys, I think you're astonishingly pretty, a staggerer.' He didn't though; and it suddenly occurred to him that he had met quite a number of prettier girls—belonging to his own class, as people still said—who hadn't interested him at all, whereas this girl was most curiously attractive and exciting. Like a jolly good musicall, he told himself. Well, whatever it was that drew him, it wasn't the mere look of her, though that was agreeable enough.

'You'd have to say that, wouldn't you? Well, *I* don't think I am very pretty, so there,' she said, quite earnestly. 'There's honesty for you.'

'Why, what's the trouble?'

'Oh, my face is too broad, to begin with, and my nose isn't right. My figure isn't either, not for these days when you ought to be very long and slender or a kind of boy.'

'They're all wrong. Don't you worry about them,' he remarked, easily. 'I detest these death's head and crossbones women you see everywhere now.' He remembered, with pleasure, her fine sturdiness, now so much neighbouring warmth. But he was still wondering what it was that attracted him. All her obvious characteristics, of course, her courage and common sense and jolly impudence, floated on a deep rich stream, a Thames itself, of feminine vitality. She made Margaret Waver-

ton seem nothing but a faintly freshened and ar
mated mummy. And the Thames must have cor
into his mind, because, in some queer fashion, s
was mixed up with his feeling about London.
was as if his thought of her danced all the tir
before a backcloth of the London scene, the roa
ingly human streets of Cockneydom—of buses ar
evening papers and oyster-bars and teashops ar
barrel organs and music-halls. That in itself,
such a night, might explain it all. But he had
feeling that it didn't.

She was asking him if he was listening. 'I'
been hearing it some time,' she added.

'Hearing what?' He leaned forward a litt
then looked at the vague rounded pallor of t
face beside him, a mystery and an enchantment
its little darkness of eyes and lips.

'Outside. A kind of rushing noise.'

'I'd almost forgotten there was an outside.
can hear it now though. It's getting louder.'

'I should think it is. Sounds as if a river we
coming down on us.' She gave a little shive
'What are you going to do?'

He was opening the door of the car. 'I'm goi
to see what's happening.'

'It sounds as if you want something to happe
I believe you do. If you're not careful, you'll *ma*

happen.' There was a trace of real resentment in r tones.

He was out now on the floor of the shed, which ped down towards the entrance. It seemed to be ry wet. There was the noise of a great wash of ter coming down, and already it seemed to be shing past outside and creeping up the shed. It s difficult to see though, because the little lights the car, which had been backed in at an angle, d not shine his way.

'I say, Roger.' Gladys was calling to him. It s queer to hear his Christian name like that, com- g out of a dark place in a still unfamiliar voice. e felt as if he had suddenly dropped fifteen years d started over again. 'If you're going far, wait minute,' she went on, 'because I'm coming with u.'

'I'm not going far,' he replied. 'Hardly a step rther.' The water was certainly coming into the ed; a flood had been loosed upon them from mewhere; there was the sound of a river roaring st. 'Look out,' he shouted. 'I'm coming back.' sudden rush of water had swept round the cor- r like a little tidal wave. In a second, it was arly up to his knees, and the next moment he was mbing into the car again.

'Look at that,' he panted. 'Water's pouring into e place.' She leaned across and looked through

the open door, while he tried to squeeze the wate out of the bottom of his trousers.

'Why,' she cried, 'if it gets any higher it'll be i here soon.'

'In that case,' he grunted, still bending and tryin to wring his trousers, 'you'll have to keep your fee on the cushions.'

She put out a hand. 'But suppose it gets highe and higher. My God, we're simply trapped here

He straightened himself now, brought his fac close to hers and smiled at her through the dee dusk. 'We could get out somehow. Besides it can' rise much. It's bound to run away very quickly It's rather amusing, don't you think?'

'Amusing!' He thought he saw her pull a fac at him. 'I like your idea of amusement.'

His fingers touched something smooth and cold It was the flask. He'd forgotten that too. 'There' just a spot left,' he said, shaking it. 'You have it

'Don't want it, thanks. Finish it yourself.'

'Shall I? Or shall I keep it for an emergency Or is this an emergency? Tell me that.'

'You just said it wasn't, didn't you, Mr. Cleve Man? But hurry up and finish it.' She leane sideways against the cushions, her face turne towards him. 'I believe I want to go to sleep,' sh yawned. 'I'll be off in a minute.' But inside sh didn't feel a bit sleepy, all excited.

'If you went to sleep, something tremendous would happen and then you'd miss it.' He went rambling on while he slowly unscrewed the flask. 'You might wake up to find the water an inch from your chin and trout darting under your arms. Then again, of course, you might wake up to find that you weren't here at all but crossing Picadilly Circus to catch the last Tube train.'

'And where would you be?'

'Nowhere at all. You'd have just dreamt me. You know how people you've seen only once or twice, as you saw me, pop up in your dreams and become quite important. Well, I should be one of them.'

'I don't want to wake up in Picadilly Circus then.'

'Why?' He looked at her above the flask.

'Because I like you.'

'And by rain, by darkness, and by Sir Roderick Femm himself!' he cried, 'I like you too. I feel this is a great and solemn moment. You're sure you don't want any of this whisky?'

'Yes, I told you I didn't.'

'Then it must be put to an even nobler purpose than that of helping to rot my liver.'

'What are you going to do? Something crazy, I'll bet. I can see it coming.'

'I'm going to sacrifice it—the last drop too, mind,

and I'm coldish—to celebrate this moment. I'
address a few remarks, we won't call it a prayer, t
the gods, and then I'll pour it out as an offering,
libation. How's this?' He sat bolt upright. 'O
gods of light and beauty and happiness,' he bega
in rich vibrating tones, 'crowned with flowers
eternal May, hear the cry that comes from the litt
world that you have left so long unvisited. Behol
two mortals whose hearts were fashioned for you
service but who sit in a darkness within a darknes
homeless, lost, the black water rising roun
them ——'

'I shall want to weep in a minute,' she inte
rupted. 'You ought to go on the stage, Roger

'I am on the stage, Gladys. I'm on it all th
time, but only wander about trying to remembe
what my next cue is, and what the play's about, an
wondering who the devil can be in the audienc
But you've ruined my exhortation now. I'll hav
to trust to the libation. Here goes.' He held ou
the flask and raised his voice again. 'Accept th
offering, all that we can give, the last drops of ou
golden spirit.' The flask was solemnly emptied int
the water just outside the door.

'Well, d'you feel any better now?' she enquire
as he returned to her side. She was smiling at hin

He had twisted round, so that they were sittin
face to face, and now his hands shot out to clasp he

ms. 'Do you know, I believe I do,' he cried. 'I nk they'd have a glance at us—those gods, I ean—even before I made the libation, and now ey may really take notice of us. When I come think of it, I've felt depressed only once to-ght, and that's almost a record.'

'When was that?' She pressed gently against e hands that were still curved loosely round her ms.

'Oh, before you arrived; just after we went into e house. I can remember the very moment. l been left alone, and suddenly everything went hollow as hell—perhaps you don't know the eling?'

'Don't I though! I've had weeks of it, when s a bother to breathe, let alone get up and wash d do your hair and dress and eat ——'

'And walk about and talk to people or even look their silly eyes, and then undress and crawl into d, to try and sleep, and after that begin it all er again. I know. Still, I shouldn't have ought you would.'

'Well, I do,' she said, gravely. 'Why did you nk I didn't?'

'You seemed to have so much life in you, good l stuff,' he replied, considering her. 'I couldn't agine anything downing you for more than a min-e. I don't believe it does.'

'Oh yes, it does.' She nodded her head, round-eyed, like a child. Then she laughed. 'For tha matter,' she cried, 'I shouldn't have thought it o you either. I never met anybody so full of beans Why, even when you're saying how miserable yo are, you seem to be enjoying yourself a lot mor than most people are when they think they're reall happy for once. Look at Sir Bill there. H wouldn't admit he wasn't ever enjoying himself but at the top of his form, with a pint or two o champagne tucked away inside him, he's a dam sight more miserable than you are when you tal as if you were nearly dead. So there, Miste Roger.'

'Ah, but'— and he shook his head— 'to-night' different. That's what I'm really trying to tel you.'

'I'd risk every night being different, with you Not that you aren't fed up, of course. It didn' take me long to see that. And then that story o yours. That got over all right with me, I can tel you. But you've no need to sit about, thinking i out over and over again or doping yourself. You'r not really that sort. I know. You're full of figh and fun. I'm a bit like that myself but not so muc as you are, and that's why I like you or partly why Only I'm not clever like you and that makes it easie for me.'

'I'm just not quite so clever as a ten-year-old riever,' he protested. 'And that's not modesty her. I don't even want to be clever. I've met me of the clever ones, and they make me sick.'

She stirred and then moved a little closer to him. Why don't you do something?'

'What's this?' he exclaimed softly. 'Good vice?'

'Sounds like it, doesn't it? I expect you're think- it's damned cheek, coming from me.'

'No, I'm not. It couldn't come from a better rson; I wouldn't have it from anybody else, I lieve. But what do you mean exactly?'

Before she replied, she slid a hand up the cush- and then rested her cheek against it. He found nething curiously moving in that little action, seen guely in the gloom of their little covered place. was one of those things that women carry over m childhood. And now she was beginning to plain herself in that funny little voice of hers, ich had been hastily shedding acquired accents d becoming more piquant all the time they had n talking together.

'What I mean is this,' she began. 'Have a pop something. Start something fresh. Take a nce again. But try something you haven't tried ore. You can call it good advice if you like, d it is for your own good I'm telling you; but I

don't mean you ought to go to night-school or keep hens or put five shillings a week in the Post Office Savings Bank. You can work the confidence trick or run a roulette board, if it comes to a pinch—though I can't see you doing anything like that—but the thing is, do something. If you think everything's all wrong—about the war and all that—you could at least take a soap-box round and spout at street corners, like the Bolshies or socialists or whatever they are. Anyhow, do something, and then you won't know yourself.'

He'd had a glimpse of the essentially feminine point of view. We're tremendously important as persons, he said to himself, but they're just detached and amused about all our antics, whether we're running a roulette or weighing the sun. We're still spending half our time, in their eyes, scrambling in and out of the big nursery cupboard. Gladys plainly thought his grand deep philosophic pessimism—which she was obviously ready to lump with socialism and relativity and psychoanalysis and fascism and anything else she may have heard about—could be disposed of by talking it out, being only so much steam to be let off. And perhaps it *was* so much steam to be let off. Perhaps she was wiser than he was. It was all very fascinating; and one thing having this point of view described in books and quite another thing coming across it like

, suddenly seeing a fantastically coloured search-
t flashing out of a familiar sky. Here at his
ow was really another world; and it was soft,
m, and breathing, a person, somebody you could
and laugh and cry with, not so very different
most things, indeed strangely like you. His
ught, having raced round this little circle, sud-
ly stopped.

And if you're cross now,' she was saying, 'then
're no sport, and I don't like you.'

I was never less cross,' he cried. 'The fact
I'm all excited. Either there's something very
dy about a car that's standing still or throwing
whisky away has made me drunk.' He really
feel oddly exultant all of a sudden. 'I think
spell must be working. Life's suddenly changed
n being a damned long dusty road into an enor-
us hamper, and I feel as if I'm trying to lift the
now. Gladys, I want to give you a colossal hug.'

Her hands came down in front of her and then
ered towards him. 'Well,' she said, calmly, 'if
's how you feel, go on.'

he was in his arms and her face was tilted back,
w inches away. They kissed. Then her hand
passed over his cheek, and his arms tightened
ut her and they kissed again. It was all done
quietly and comfortably, without any of the
d fumbling and straining of a new passion,

yet it had not only meaning but intensity. Thi intensity, however, like a slant of sunlight, ha passed through a mellowing atmosphere of larg friendliness.

Now, her hands pressing against him, she gentl pushed herself away. Penderel drew a long breath He wasn't bewildered, he wasn't ecstatic; he wa suddenly and solidly happy. He felt enormousl rich.

'I didn't mean that, you know,' she remarked 'when I said you ought to do something.'

'That's a pity. No, it isn't.' It was funny. H was cool enough, and yet his voice wasn't. It wa hoarse, unsteady. 'Well, I will do something now I'll start this week.'

'Listen, Roger.' She put a hand on his arm 'Why don't you come to London?'

'I will. As a matter of fact, I'm on my wa there now. That sounds damned odd, when yo think of it.'

'You must think I'm rushing it.' She was ver serious now. 'But I can't help it. I feel I must while we're here and it's quiet and—Oh!—I don' know. But listen. Do you—will you—want to se me again?'

His hands went out but she caught and hel them. 'No, never mind about that, now. Tell me honestly and truly, do you?'

'Of course I do,' he cried. 'What a question! Why, you're the very person I'm going to see, though I didn't know it when I began this journey. But then I didn't know anything. When do we get there? Anyhow, we'll begin with dinner the very first night, that is, if Sir William doesn't object. What about him?'

'Don't be silly. He doesn't matter. He can fade out. He's done that already.'

'So he has,' he assented. 'And it's a comforting thought. But what's this about town?'

'I want to see you too. And I want to help if you'll start again. I'll do anything, everything.'

His mind went blundering after her. 'Do you mean——' he began.

'Don't you see what I mean?' she broke in, with a whispered vehemence. 'I'll do everything. Oh, it sounds crazy, I know. Don't think I'm always like this. I've never been like this before. But the girl from the chorus you've met in the middle of the night is telling you she'll live with you if you want her to, and there you have it. She's gone mad and is flinging herself at you.'

'And he's trying to fling himself at her,' he cried, clasping her arms. An idea was fermenting in his mind. Why shouldn't they try it together? They'd nothing to lose, at least he hadn't, and everything to gain. It was delightfully crazy, this idea of his,

which wasn't identical with hers, much crazier. Bu
he hadn't tested the strength of hers yet. 'You'r
absolutely regal, Gladys; you take my breath away
But listen to me a minute ——'

'Are you going to tell me you don't want me
she demanded, 'because you've only to nod an
it'll save you the trouble?'

'No, I'm not,' he replied hastily. 'Somethin
quite different.'

'Then I know what it is,' she went on, 'and I'm
going to tell you. You were just going to point ou
that you hadn't much money and didn't exactl
know where you were going to earn any and tha
I'd have a damned thin time, weren't you? I knew
you were. Well, that doesn't matter. If you reall
like me enough, we can have some fun togethe
and manage somehow. To begin with, I can ge
a job. I really have been in the chorus, you know
—though lately I've been resting—though I've no
had much from Bill, you needn't think it; he's no
keeping me really—and I can go back to the chorus
If there's nothing doing there, I can easily get
job of some sort—there's a girl I know managin
a milliner's who'd get me into the shop. An
we'd find a cheap little flat, high up, somewhere no
too far out, and if you found anything at all to do
we'd manage all right. I know I'd be pretty rotte
and you probably wouldn't be comfortable at firs

can't do much—something quick and easy on a
s-ring is about my limit in cooking—but I'd try
d I'd be happy so long as you didn't curse me too
ten. I know what it means, of course; I'm not
kid. Living like that with anybody else but you
ould be little hell; but with you it would be all
fferent—there'd be fun and excitement all the
ne—and we'd go roaming round together and talk
d talk about everything, just as we've been doing
-night, and we wouldn't feel lost and lonely any
ore. I know I'm not the sort of girl you used
think about—like that other one—but I under-
nd; and if you ever got depressed I'd tease you
t of it and then love you hard—Oh! you must
ink I'm silly!' A little chokey cry, and she had
ng her arms round him and was pressing her face
ainst his.

'My dear, my dear,' he found himself saying.
e saw the two of them crazily garreting it to-
ther somewhere above the bus tops; laughing or
ousing together if nothing came off; jubilant over
e occasional windfalls; rushing one another into
e. He was holding her close now, was protec-
e, soothing; yet all the time he had a dim feeling
at it was he who was finding comfort, sustenance
elf, in this happy weight in his arms. Here was
e way back into things. But he wouldn't sneak
to share her attic. His own idea, mad as it

seemed, was better than that. They'd get marrie
risk all and then plunge in together. No dou
people were right; he'd wanted the moon; now he
start again and simply want cheese; and perha
in the end he'd find that the moon was made
cheese after all.

He put a hand on her hair and gently tilted ba
her face so that he could kiss her again. 'It's
great idea, Gladys,' he told her, 'and you're wo
derful, and we'll make it all happen. Only my id
improves on yours, though you'll probably think
crazy.'

'Tell me,' she whispered. 'What is it?'

'Let's go back first, and then I will.' She mu
hear it back in the house, with other people n
far away, where she could test it. Anything w
plausible here, in this tiny odd world they seem
to have created for themselves. 'We've been t
long away as it is. We'll go back now.'

'No, no. You want to leave me.' He felt h
body stiffen in his arms.

'I don't. Not ever. But we must see what t
others are doing. They're probably asleep.' H
couldn't help feeling that they weren't, thoug
'Then we'll talk it all out. I've a special reas
for wanting to finish it off there.'

'All right.' She drew back but kept her ey
fixed on his. Then, after a pause, she went o

ut are you sure ——?' The question died away. er voice was dubious; her stare was dubious, som- e. He was instantly visited by a curious mixed eling of alarm and shame. It had occurred to r that she really knew nothing about him. And knew nothing about her. They were strangers, ring through the dusk at one another. Voices, estioning eyes, the electric contact of flesh, and u seemed to know everything—a turn of the heel, a click, and you knew nothing. The old spair returned; he was trapped again. Without nking what he was doing, he took hold of her nd and the next moment it had given him a warm rd squeeze. At the same time a thought arrived, st as if it had been squeezed into him.

'Why,' he cried aloud, 'it's all bosh!'

'What!' She withdrew her hand instantly. 'hat d'you mean?'

'Sorry! I didn't mean about us, you know, ough we come into it. I'd been thinking and d just made a discovery.'

She regarded him indulgently. 'You'd better t it off your chest, hadn't you? Go on. I'm tening.'

'We all get on a romantic switchback—up and wn, up and down all the time.' He was talking himself rather than to her. 'First we can know erything and it's wonderful, then we can know

nothing and it's all rotten. Just as if there wasn
a way in between! There always is, all the tim
and we're simply too damned proud and lazy an
egoistical to find it and go down it. The thin
we won't bother with is just plain common sens
It frightens us. It makes us seem less importan
Why, after all, Gladys, I know you——'

'Do you though?' she interrupted. 'That's wh
I've just been wondering about. You don't reall
do you? I don't really know you, though I see
to, better than anybody. That's funny, isn't it
She was very eager, excited.

'Yes, I do,' he replied, sturdily. 'I don't kno
all about you, but I feel I know a devil of a lo
If I've made it up, I've made it up, and that's tha
But I can go on learning. There's truth to com
out.' He was excited himself now and sat up
if to proclaim his discovery to the world. He fe
as if he had turned a corner. 'That's what w
really don't want to believe, that there's a truth
come out. We don't want to sit tight, wait, an
learn anything. We pretend we're above sensib
compromise, when all the time we're below it. A
this disillusion's egoistical bunkum.'

'I dare say it is, though I don't know what yo
mean. I never knew anybody who went on at su
a rate. And who are you talking about, with yo
"we pretend" this and "we do" that?' She wasn

er now but amused and worshipping, as if he just done something rather clever with a box bricks. 'Now, who d'you mean?'

Oh—er—people like me, I suppose, gloomy ng asses,' he told her. 'I speak,' he added, with ck pompousness, 'for my own generation, ugh whether you are a member of that genera- or not, my dear Gladys, I am not prepared to '

You're prepared to say anything, if you ask ' She leaned forward. 'And you're a funny and I don't know why I'm bothering myself ut you.' Her cheek was lightly brushed across and a hand passed over his head.

That was benediction,' he said. 'Now we must We'll begin again—never to end—in the se. Ready?' He rose from the seat and dis- ered that his feet were very cold and his legs e cramped.

No, Roger, no!' She was holding his arm. n't let's go back there. Let's stay here.'

He turned to stare at her. 'Why, what's the tter? We can finish the night comfortably there. nay be queerish, but at least there's a fire. Why 't you want to go?'

Because there's something—oh!—I dunno. I'm y I suppose. P'raps it's just because I don't it to leave this funny little place—I'd almost

forgotten it's the back seat of a car; if you've be
happy in a place, no matter what it's like, y
don't want to leave it, do you? It's a risk movi
on, isn't it? I expect that's it.' But she sound
very doubtful.

He switched off the small lights of the c
found the torch, and stepped out into about a fo
of water. 'We shall have to wade back,' he to
her, flashing the light inside. 'I wonder if I cou
carry you.'

'No, you couldn't,' she replied. 'I'm an awf
weight.' Nevertheless he swooped upon her, ju
as she was getting out, and went splashing forwa
with her in his arms, contriving at the same tim
to send the light of the torch before them. Th
tiny fantastic journey was for them both like t
mingling of a nightmare, in which all famili
things suddenly lost their identity, crawling in
nothingness or taking on shapes of terror, and o
of those clear dreams in which the enchanted hea
recognises and claims its most secret desires as
they were children long-lost. Here the drea
their sense of one another, their nearness a
warmth, threaded through the nightmare ma
up of the sight of that obliterating black wat
the air that seemed like hanging crepe, the corne
of the house that gleamed sharply in the light
his torch like naked bone, and a fear, swelling b

nd sensible dimensions, lest his foot should slip
d they should fall. More than once she pro-
sted but he would not put her down, and twice
had to rest, leaning heavily against the wall of
e house, with one arm still holding her tight.
et and aching, he was staggering now past a
hted window. The door could not be far away.
adys threw out a hand, found the wall, and stead-
l them both, wondering all the while at his odd
termination to indulge his whim at any cost. She
und herself slipping down out of his arms, and
r feet touched the highest of the three steps.
e came scrambling up after her, sank back against
e side of the door, and fought for his breath.
ıd now, for the second time that night, he had his
nd upon the knocker.

Chapter Eleven

ONCE inside the room, Margare peeped round Philip's shoulder. I was a large room and Margaret ha a vague impression that it was ful of lovely old things; but thei candle, the only light there, merel illuminated a tiny space and then simply conjure the rest of the room, the circling darkness, int rich dusk, in which there wavered and shone, fro unseen polished surfaces, little reflections of i flame. Thus she saw a background of shadows an some twinkling points of light, like a night sky Then she stepped out from behind Philip an cleared her eyes. They were in a very large bed room, heavy with old furniture. The bed itsel was a huge shadowy affair, a great four-poster, can opied with dark curtains at the head.

A voice came from the gloom there, and the moved forward. The light now fell on a han resting on the counterpane, the hand of a very ol man, a featherweight of brittle bone.

'Who are you?' the voice was asking. Leavin Philip behind, still holding the candle, Margare

ew nearer to the bed. Now she could dimly see
e man who was lying there, could see his white
ir and long white beard; his face was vague yet
riously luminous; it moved a little; he must be
oking at her. 'Who are you?' The question was
peated. Even here, his voice seemed nothing
ore than a whisper.

Philip had heard it too, but remained where he
s for the moment, feeling sure that Margaret
nted to reply herself, to explain why they were
ere. He was more than content that she should.
ho were they? It was a question that came very
tly, pointedly, ironically from that bed.

'I am Mrs. Waverton and this is my husband,'
argaret was saying. 'Are you Sir Roderick
mm?'

'Yes . . . Sir Roderick. . . .' The voice came
faintly as before; the words might have been
oken by the very air of that dim place.

Margaret nodded and tried to smile at that blur
face with its ghostly sheen. 'We have had to
e shelter here for the night. There has been a
y bad storm. We came in because we thought
heard you calling. Can we get you anything?'

The hand that had been lying on the counterpane
med to raise itself, and, like something clumsily
ating, it moved uncertainly towards the right of
bed, where there was a little table. It's hor-

rible, Philip thought as he stared; it's like watch
ing a ghost, no, worse than that, a spirit comin
back to try to make the old, rusty, creaky machiner
of the body work again. The real Sir Roderick ha
already retired from life. Yet he hadn't; he wa
wanting something; yes, he was still wanting some
thing; and that made it all the worse. What wa
he saying?

'Water,' came the whisper. 'Glass empty . .
Water over there . . .'

Margaret had heard and understood. 'Yes, I'l
get you some,' she said, and taking up the glas
from the little table, she went in the direction th
hand had pointed and filled the glass from a caraf
that she found on the top of a chest of drawer
there. She still trembled slightly and felt a littl
heart-sick, but the action gave her a certain feelin
of warmth and confidence. Returning with th
glass, she put it into the awaiting hand, a frail curv
of bone. 'Can you take it yourself,' she enquired
gently, 'or shall I give it to you?'

'I can—do it—myself,—thank you.' The han
closed round the glass and slowly raised it. Fo
one second the water caught and held the candl
light and became liquid gold. The old man's hea
came forward shakily, and they had a glimpse of
great curved nose, shaggy white brows, and waste
cheeks. Somehow it didn't seem difficult to believ

at he had once been easily the tallest and strongest
d handsomest of the family, a magnificent figure.
e had been a great man once, they had said. No
ubt it was true; and now he could hardly raise
e glass to his lips, and when he did at last suc-
ed in drinking some of the water, spilling it into
s mouth, it seemed a triumphant achievement.

The water appeared to revive him, however, for
was able to replace the glass on the table, and
ough his head sank back again upon the piled
lows, into the deep shadow of the curtains, there
emed to be a faint trace of animation in his move-
ents. But his voice remained the same, a ghostly
isper, a mere breath in the air. Yet it was he
o spoke first, before Margaret could ask him if
ere was anything else he wanted.

'What was—the noise there?' he asked.

Margaret explained, very briefly and as lightly
she could, what had happened outside. She had
pped back now and was standing by the side
Philip.

'Morgan—is a savage,' they heard. 'It was—
e drink though. We have had to keep him here'
and the voice trailed away into a long pause—
cause of my brother. I must—apologise for
n.'

This was the master of the house, though he
med to whisper to them across an open grave, and

here were accents they had not caught before under this roof. It was queer how this little speech appeared to lift a weight, the pressure of something unnamed, from their minds.

'Did you say—you were husband and wife?' The whisper came again, after a brief silence, filled with departing images.

'Yes, we are,' Margaret replied, very simply, like a child; and Philip felt her hand on his arm. She couldn't help it; answering that had somehow been like another marriage ceremony, graver than that other in the little church at Otterwell. She thought of that and then innumerable little pictures flashed across her mind: the two of them dining together that night at the Gare de Lyon; then going through the dust and faerie of Provence; the tiny flat in Doughty Street, with Philip painting the fireplace; the Hampstead house and Betty in the garden; and with all that had not been shared since flitting darkly through her mind like a bad dream.

He spoke again out of the shadow. 'You are fortunate—very fortunate. I never married. There was—so much to do—but I came—to be very lonely—at last.' In spite of the frequent pauses, there was no gasping nor obvious effort in his speech, and its faint drip-drip of words gave it a strangely remote, oracular quality. He wasn't

versing, Philip felt; he was too old for that; re was only time to call faintly from the darken- hillside. Philip didn't want to move nor even speak; he only wanted to stand there, staring oss the flame of the candle, listening and won- ing.

There was a slight stirring in the bed and the d groped its way towards the little table. Mar- et started forward out of her dream and gave the glass again. This time he leaned further ward than before and after he had sipped and glass had been replaced, he remained where was, looking at them, with the light falling on face. Years and disease had played havoc there, his eyes were hidden by his thick brows; but, r and above all that, there was a marked differ- e between him and the other two Femms. They only a moment, however, in which to return his tiny, that curiously impersonal stare of old age, no sooner had he spoken again than he sank k into the shadow. 'You shouldn't have come e,' he whispered, and then vanished from the t.

Oh, I'm sorry,' said Margaret, hastily apologetic. t we couldn't help it, you know. We were abso- ly cut off and had no other place to shelter in.' flashed a glance at Philip.

It wasn't a mere matter of comfort,' he put in,

'but of escaping from real danger. There was a landslide and a flood.' He felt as if he were earnestly addressing nothing, as if Sir Roderick had departed and would not return until he was ready to make another remark.

He made another now. But first they saw the hand on the counterpane lifted, presumably to cut short their explanations and apologies. 'I'm afraid —you misunderstand me,' he said, very slowly. 'You make me—seem inhospitable. I was never that—never.' Here they caught the dry husk of a laugh, a ghostly and incredible sound. 'This house —was always filled with guests—at one time—years ago—many years.' They could almost hear those years rustling by in the long pauses. And Margaret suddenly thought of Rachel Femm and the young men who came riding in and the women smothered in silks and scents who had laughed at Miss Femm. This room, the whole house, was dimmed and thick with presences, haunted.

'I wish—I could have—received you,' the whisper, so curiously remote, began again. 'But you see, I am—old—ailing—tired now. I have done—with life. No—not quite done. There is always something—we want. Now—it is—a drink of water.'

'Do you want one now?' Margaret asked, reach-

out for the glass. She did not choose to see ond the simple need.

'Thank you,' he said, without emphasis; and hand went fumbling out. In that gesture, even re than in the two whispered words, Philip med to discover a deliberate and frugal irony, an ny that would have been simply terrifying at any er time. Now, after so many of his thoughts l gone down this dusty way, it came strangely reassure him. He was able to cling to the fact t something looked out above the wreckage, un- quered, serene.

Once more refreshed by a sip or two of water ir host returned to the shadows and spoke again. o doubt—when you came—they told you. I n't know what—they told you.'

'We were told,' said Margaret, very quietly, at you were an invalid and in bed.'

'That is—only the beginning. Was that all?'

Remembering so many things, Margaret felt fused, and looked at Philip. But Philip, not owing how to begin to answer the question, shook head. He felt as if the old man were listening efully to their silence and would soon reply to it. This he did. 'You have seen—my brother, race—and my sister? And Morgan—you have n him. You have been thinking—this is a strange use—a strange family. You may have wondered

—whether you did well—in coming—even for shelter—out of the storm—into this house—this old dark house. I should like—to tell you everything—to explain. But there's no time—no time to explain. I like to see you—standing there—very young, younger than you think—and I haven't seen—anybody like you—so young—for many a year. I had almost forgotten. . . .' His voice floated into a silence. They waited, unstirring, for him to come groping out of his reverie. Then he went on, more brokenly now: 'I could have told you—a long story—but no time. And talking—tires me.'

'I'm sure it does,' said Margaret. 'Please don't trouble. We're only disturbing you.'

He raised his hand a few inches, as if gently commanding her to be silent. 'Terrible misfortune,' he whispered, 'came—to this house. First death—very early—for two—a young boy—then a girl, Rachel. Then—after years—something broke down—the life ran out—there came—a strain of madness.' He broke off and there was silence again.

Standing here in this shadowy room, listening to this curiously remote voice, Philip thought, might seem more fantastic than creeping on that landing above or fighting with Morgan outside, than hearing Miss Femm's screaming or watching Mr Femm's hollow eyes; yet he could not help feeling

a light were about to shine through the house, f he were coming out at the end of a long el.

t didn't touch me—this madness,' he began n. 'At least—I don't think—it did—though e was a time—years and years ago—before you e born—when I was wild—did mad things—I 't know. It touched—all the others—various s—different degrees—but shut them all off ehow—stopped them all really living—passed n through a little death—half-way—then set n going again—with something dead inside. have seen my brother Horace—still sharp—nd of cunning—but all empty and brittle—a l—with something gone—for ever. And then ebecca—poor creature—she may have troubled —nearly deaf—shut off—everything missed—now with a God—a God behind her—a God is deaf—vengeful—half-crazed—like she is. 't let her trouble you—yet have pity on her—are young—don't anger her—only for one t. But you have seen—the last of her perhaps she asleep? Is it—very late? I feel—we all nt to be asleep.'

Yes, it's very late,' Margaret told him. uldn't you like to go to sleep now?' But this only a little part of herself, a little mechanical , that was talking, though pity for him re-

mained. The rest of her was darkly bewildere and on edge. The soft slow pat-patter of his voi and this shuttered room and thick haunted air we beating down her spirit.

'Not yet,' came the voice again, answering h question. 'There'll be—plenty of time to sleep soon. There's still something left—to tell you for there may be—danger.'

'Danger!' she cried, shooting a glance at Philip Was he thinking of Morgan? Was he thinking all? Perhaps it was he who was mad, far crazie than the others, and was dragging them and th whole house into some long nightmare spun out loneliness and pain.

Philip found his voice now. Here, he felt, could ask questions and be answered. 'Danger? D you mean from Morgan?'

'No—not directly. We keep him here—becau of my brother, Saul.'

'Saul?' But something was swiftly taking sha in Philip's mind even as he cried out the nam That door.

'Ah!—they have said nothing—about Saul?' came with maddening deliberation.

'No, no, what about him?' Margaret tore th question out of a tormented mind. Why didn't hurry, hurry!

'It was on him—there fell—the heaviest blo

aging madness. At times—he is a dangerous
iac. Always he wanted—to destroy—to wipe
everything—so that life—could be made—over
n. There was—you see—a kind of nobility—
Saul—but now his mind—lives—in darkness.
always—but the madness returns—to destroy
—the destroyer.'

Where is he?' asked Margaret, shakily. The
stion was directed at the bed but actually she
looking at Philip, who was now nodding his
d and frowning as he always did when he
ught he knew something important.

know where he is,' Philip announced. 'I've
rd him and seen his room, at least the door of
He's upstairs, isn't he, behind those bolts?'

Yes—he is there,' Sir Roderick replied. 'He's
locked in now—for several days—has been
violent—I understand. Only Morgan—can
after him—such times. He doesn't attempt—
urt Morgan—even during—the worst attacks.
Morgan—half savage—very superstitious—is
oted to him. Otherwise—Saul couldn't have
ayed here.' Obviously he could only speak
an effort now, and the pauses seemed to be
er between each whispered phrase. It seemed
e sheer weakness, however, and not actual pain
was mastering him.

But if he did get out, we could lock ourselves

in somewhere, couldn't we?' Margaret herself wa whispering now. She was cold and felt all hollo inside.

'You could,' came the answer, so softly. 'Bu if he—found his way—downstairs—to a fire—c lights—or even matches—I think—he might s fire—to the house. He has tried—before—a sacr fice—cleansing by fire—he called it. Up there- in his room—there is nothing—no fire nor matche —that is why—we had electric lighting.'

Margaret bit her lips. She wanted to grab hol of Philip and run away, anywhere, back into th darkness and rain, through the flood if necessar

Philip concentrated his mind, the prey of hug trampling images, with desperate swiftness. Some thing had to come yet. This voice, calling so weakl from some remote high place, seemed to be lettin down a fine silken cord; it floated before him, a si ver thread in the mirk; and he felt he had to gras it, hold on to it, or the world was lost. 'But thos bolts will hold, surely,' he cried. 'That doo seemed strong enough.'

'It is—but this is—what I wanted—to tell you If Morgan—is so bad—if he's not asleep—or com —to his senses—I think he might—open the doo You will have—to watch him.'

'Philip!' Margaret gave a little scream, an he felt her hands fumbling on his coat. Wh

n't he thought of that before? He must see Morgan was still there—though there hadn't n much time for him to recover—and then find others and decide what to do. 'Stay here,' he to Margaret. 'I'll go and have a look at him.' dashed out into the landing, and she followed ar as the door.

. few steps in the flickering candlelight and he that Morgan was not there. 'Morgan,' he d, without thinking. Before he could reach place where Morgan had been lying, where the ken lamp and its splintered glass told their tale, oor on the left opened and there peered out a like paper. It was Mr. Femm.

He's just gone,' Mr. Femm gabbled reedily. ne upstairs. I heard him go. He's gone to Saul out, I know he has. And Saul's mad, mad. out of the way. Wait for him downstairs. re are three of you. Wait for him there. Kill .' And the face was gone, the door banged nd locked.

hilip hastened back down the landing and found garet swaying in the doorway. 'You heard ?' he cried, pushing her forward into the room. may be letting him out.'

What are we to do?' she gasped. 'Can't we here? Lock the door?'

No, we can't do that. Mustn't let him loose

downstairs. And the others don't know.' He s
there was a key inside the door. 'We shall ha
to get downstairs at once. I can't go and tac
the two of them up there.'

The whisper came from the bed again. 'Y
go. Lock me in—and take the key—with you.'

Philip drew back the door, took out the k
gave the candle to Margaret and motioned h
forward. She turned swiftly in the doorway, ho
ever, and called back: 'Oh, are you sure you'll
all right?'

'Yes—all right—take care—good luck.' T
voice seemed to come from miles away, throu
a great darkness, the last friendly whisper of h
manity. The next moment they were outside, w
the door locked behind them.

There was a moment's silence, during which th
ears seemed to catch the last faint vibrations
that voice from the darkened bed. They w
hurrying towards the stairs, but they had not go
more than a few paces when the silence was brok
A yell of laughter went pealing through the hou
It came from somewhere above, perhaps throu
an open door. It was the sudden laughter of ma
ness. At the sound of it, the mind, hearing its o
knell ringing in an empty sky, ran affrighted, a
the heart, awaking out of its dream of peace a
kindness, stood still.

Chapter Twelve

SIR WILLIAM heard the knocking again, sat up and rubbed his eyes, stared at the door for a minute, recovering his wits, then marched across and opened it wide. 'Hello!' he cried, as the bedraggled pair staggered past him into the room. 'And where the devil have you two been?' He followed them across to the fire.

'It's a long story,' Penderel began; his face was pale and a little drawn, but his eyes were dancing.

'Then cut it short,' Sir William growled. What a wild young devil he looks, he told himself; something between a gunman and a fiddler.

Penderel was busy taking off his boots. 'Well, you see, I went out to Waverton's car to get my flask ——'

Here Gladys broke in: 'And I went with him to the door, and then I was shut out and couldn't get in, and so I found him in the car and we sat there and talked.' She looked at him rather defiantly, very bright-eyed. 'And we've had to wade through a lake to get back.'

Penderel was padding across the room in stockinged feet, in search of his bag. 'Why, wha been happening here?' he asked.

'God knows. I don't. I've been hanging abo here, waiting for somebody to come or somethi to happen. And just look at the place. It gets your nerves. Every time I've wakened up I've h a shock.'

'But where are they all?' Gladys looked b wildered.

'Don't ask me. Can't tell you.' Sir Willia blew out his breath impatiently. 'I'll tell you wh I do know. The lights went out. Waverton a what's-his-name—Femm—went off to find a lan They're finding it yet. Then that little screechi woman—she's as mad as a hatter, that woman, a I hope I've seen the last of her—well, she want someone to shut a window. I did that and listen to her raving. Then she dug out a little lamp a I came back with it. That's the one.' He point to the tiny oil lamp burning on the table. 'Go job I brought it, too, or I'd have been in the da Well, when I came back, Mrs. Waverton had d appeared. I didn't want to start roaming rou the house so waited here by the fire. Must ha dozed off. Thought I heard a crash somewhe but may have dreamt it. Woke up though, but n

dy came, so dozed off again and next thing I ard was you knocking.'

Gladys exchanged glances with Penderel, who as coming back with some clothes over his arm. Ve must investigate this,' he said cheerfully. He oved over to a door opposite the staircase, to the ft of the fireplace, a door that had not been opened t. 'I wonder what happens in here. Could I in, do you think?'

'Why?' Gladys was alarmed. 'What are you ing to do?'

He grinned at her. 'Change my trousers.' He oked a little longer and his grin changed to a ile. 'Back in a minute.' The door closed behind m.

Sir William had turned quickly and was now lding Gladys lightly at arm's length. 'What's e idea, Gladys? Amusing yourself, or love at st sight?'

She met his look bravely. 'It's real, Bill. You on't mind. You're too decent—and friendly. ou ought to be glad.'

'Oh!—ought I?—you monkey! Sharp work, I ust say. But—tell me—is it—both sides? What out him?'

She nodded gravely. Then suddenly her face up, and the sentimental boy who still lived inside him felt as if he were catching a glimpse

of sunrise in a lost world. It was indeed the mo exquisite sensation she had ever given him, and struggled hard not to enjoy it. 'I can't begin tell you——' she began.

'Then don't,' he broke in, still at odds with hir self.

Then he softened: 'No, go on. Let's hear a about it.'

She came nearer and put a hand on his arr 'There isn't time. But listen, Bill. It's no goo pretending to be cross. I know you don't mean He's coming to town, to be with me. I want hi to do something, put his back into it, and I kno he will. You saw what he was like before, abs lutely fed up, not caring a damn about anythin Well, I'm knocking that on the head, knocked already.'

'Ah, the old game, eh?' He chuckled over he 'Reforming him already, are we? Then it's seriou

'It is, but it's going to be a hell of a lark to Now you've got to help. You can easily find him job, you've plenty to spare.'

'For solid downright cheek,' he exclaimed, 'gi me a young woman who thinks herself in love.'

'Now don't be silly. It isn't cheek, and y know it's not. Besides, he's tremendously cleve you can see that, and full of push and go. Hur up and say you will, he's coming back.'

'Well, I'll see,' he muttered, receiving her quick glance of gratitude. 'I'll have a talk to him.' He could see that door opening behind him in her very eyes.

'The world's great age begins anew.' Penderel's voice rang through that dim place. His sudden high spirits seemed to light it up. 'Gladys, Sir William, I've changed my socks and trousers—in the dark too, mind you—and now I'm a new man. I don't know what there was in that room. I just stood behind the door. Perhaps it was full of monsters, all watching me. By the way, you've been talking about me. I see it written in your faces. Your silence tells me all. I could even guess what you've been saying. Here's the evidence. Sir William knows, in his heart of hearts, that even if he would, I wouldn't.'

'You've been listening,' Gladys cried, making a face at him.

'I only heard three words,' he replied. 'The rest was intuition, for which we men are now becoming famous. We may not be able to argue, to debate, to reason, but we *know*. Well, my first step in this new life is to locate the missing Wavertons. If necessary we could all creep round the house until we heard Waverton's snore. Then we'll bring Sir William here to sleep again, and after that, you and I, Gladys, will find a corner and talk and

talk, at least I'll talk and you'll probably sleep. The dawn, which must be somewhere on its way, will find me talking. Mr. Femm will come down to breakfast—but you can't imagine him at breakfast, can you?—in fact, you can't imagine breakfast here at all. Try to think of it.'

'I can't,' said Gladys decisively. Then, after a short pause, very slowly and clearly she added: 'I hate this house.'

'Rum old place certainly.' This from Sir William. Penderel said nothing. He was staring curiously at Gladys, who was strolling away.

She stopped. 'It's the worst house I've ever been in. And that's saying a lot, as you'd admit if you knew anything about professional digs. There's something about it—I dunno—like a bad smell—something putrid.' She walked on and then stood looking at the staircase.

Sir William took Penderel to one side. 'No business of mine, of course,' he said, gruffly, 'but what's this about you and Gladys?'

'I'll let you into the secret,' Penderel returned, gaily. 'And, by the way, isn't it funny that officially, according to the book of words, you and I ought to be totally incapable of talking to one another like ordinary human beings? At the very least, we ought to be embarrassed to the stuttering point.'

'Well, I'll tell you something.' Sir William was emphatic. 'That's just what I am.'

'Not you!' cried Penderel. 'And I'm not even pretending to be. I'm going to marry Gladys, that is, if she'll have me; I haven't asked her yet. And that's the idea.'

'Most people'd tell you that you were either a fool or a hero,' Sir William remarked, rather heavily. This rising tide of high spirits made him feel heavy. But he was trying to deal honestly with the youngster, who wasn't a bad sort in his own scatter-brained fashion. 'But I don't say so, though you may be both for all I know. It'll probably be the best day's work you've done for a damned long time.'

'It could easily be that and still not be up to much,' said Penderel. 'But I know what you mean. And I can't help feeling——'

But there came an interruption from Gladys, who was still standing near the foot of the stairs. 'I can hear somebody talking up there,' she called to them.

Penderel moved a step or two in her direction. 'That'll be the Wavertons. They must be introspecting together on one of the upper floors, walking up and down corridors still playing Truth. And quite right too!'

Her hand went up. 'Hush! I'm trying to lis-

ten. They're coming down, I think. Oh!—what's that?' They had all heard it, a kind of laugh. And now the Wavertons came running downstairs, pale and dusty and somehow rather tattered.

'Listen, you fellows.' Philip hurried across to the two men, and began to gasp out his news.

'What is it?' Gladys clutched at Margaret. 'Tell me quick.' Something terrible was going to happen, she knew there was. She felt sick. Everything was suddenly falling to pieces.

'There's a madman upstairs,' Margaret cried, jerkily. 'Morgan's let him out. He's dangerous. They both are.'

'Where's he now?' She knew, knew there was something, had known it all along.

'Up there, somewhere.' Margaret made a little gesture of helplessness. 'Coming down, perhaps.'

'We must all get out of the way then. Lock ourselves in somewhere.'

'He might set fire to the place. He's tried to do that before.'

'They can prevent him. Three of them.' Gladys looked towards the men, and then, moved by a common impulse, they both hurried across. They felt the whole house pressing down upon them.

'Even if he's as bad as all that,' Sir William was saying, 'the three of us can down him.' He was quite cool, and evidently—rather to their surprise

—a man of courage. But then no imagination was harrying him. He didn't see the whole fabric of sense and security shredding, rotting away.

'But there's Morgan, don't forget him,' Philip replied. 'I've had a tussle with him already and was lucky enough to trip him. He was a bit slow and silly, of course. But he's as strong as a bull. I don't know what sort of state he's in now, but he might be as bad as the lunatic—worse.'

'If the worst came to the worst,' Sir William said, 'we could all clear out. In fact the best thing we can do is to get out of the way.'

'You're forgetting what Waverton said,' Penderel put in. 'I mean about him setting fire to things. This old place'd burn easily, wouldn't it?' He looked at Philip.

'I should think it would. It's full of rotten old timber. That's the danger. If he gets down here, left to himself, he could set the whole place going in a jiffy.'

'Well, let him, I say,' said Gladys viciously. 'Let the rotten old place burn.'

'No, that's mad, Gladys,' Penderel told her.

'Besides,' Philip added hastily, 'there are the other Femms ——'

'Poor old Sir Roderick upstairs, unable to move,' cried Margaret. 'It was he who warned us, only just in time. We can't leave him.'

Philip and Penderel hastened to agree. Sir William looked at them and then at the stairs. 'Well what are we going to do then?' he asked. 'Time' going. Though nothing's happening yet. It may be all piffle. All these people here are a bit crazy so far as I can see.'

'No, it isn't.' Margaret was vehement. 'Didn' you hear that horrible laugh? And Philip saw th room.'

Gladys wrung her hands. 'I'm sure it's true; know it is.' She sought out Penderel with hollowed eyes. 'Yes, I do. I've felt it creeping.' Then she recovered herself. 'But we can do something can't we?' It was addressed to him alone, wistfully; the others were nothing.

'Of course we can,' he told her. But he felt sudden ache, and there followed closely upon it growing anger.

Then they all jumped. A door had been opened and someone was standing there. It was Miss Femm. How she came to be there, nobody could imagine, but there she was, still fully dressed, peering at them over a stump of candle. They didn' wait for her to screech out a question. 'Your brother's loose,' cried Philip, who was nearest.

'What, Saul?' The name went screaming up.

'They're coming down now. Look!' Gladys cried, pointing. A dark bulk was moving slowly

down the stairs, and another behind it, with a vague blur of face turned towards them. The one behind must be Saul. That hand sliding down the banisters was Saul's. Now it had stopped; but Morgan was still moving, coming down alone.

'Don't do anything yet,' Philip whispered. 'Morgan may be all right now. We'll see.'

Morgan reached the bottom, lurched forward a step or two, and then stood still, lowering at them. Such light as there was from the little lamp fell now on his face, which looked horrible—for it was all covered with blood. His hands too seemed to be reddened.

'Cut himself with that glass,' Philip whispered again.

'What's he going to do?' This was from Penderel, though he was not looking at Morgan but at that hand which still rested on the banisters.

'Get back,' Sir William was motioning to Margaret and Gladys.

Miss Femm had been standing absolutely still, staring fixedly at Morgan. Now she shook her fist at him, and her voice went piercing through them all. 'Morgan, you brute beast, go away. Hide yourself before God strikes you dead.'

The laugh they had heard before, empty and terrible, rang down from the dim stairs. 'That's Rebecca, sister Rebecca. Don't listen to her, Mor-

gan. She's been talking to God for years now and He's never heard her once. He thinks she's a maggot, a fat little white maggot. He doesn't know she's got a soul. She'll have to die and be born again before He'll hear her. They're all maggots—still creeping in the rotting old corpse they call life.' Saul's voice thickened with sudden fury. 'Trample 'em, smash 'em—and then I'll burn their filthy pulp—leave nothing but ashes—clean ashes—clean, clean, clean.' After that it was a foul gabble. They had a moment's vision of a white and blindly working face, pushed out over the banisters into the light, while the voice went gibbering on.

Then there was a little space of silence, during which nobody moved. But it seemed to them as if the ground beneath their feet was sinking, as if they were blackly descending through putrid air.

Now the madman on the stairs spoke again and his mood had suddenly changed; he seemed quietly merry. 'No, Morgan, old flesh and bone, wait, wait for me.' They saw the hand disappear. 'Still something yet to do. Then we'll finish it together.' A stir in the shadows, a creak or two from the stairs, and he was gone.

Instead of waiting, however, Morgan, who had been standing there, glowering at Philip, was suddenly quickened into life. With a hoarse cry, he charged across, straight at Philip, like a mastodon.

There was just time for Philip to swing aside and escape the full weight of the charge, and the next moment they were all struggling together. Sir William was hanging on to one great arm and shoulder, and Philip on to the other.

'Get him in there,' screamed Miss Femm, as they went desperately swaying. 'You can shut him up.' She was pointing to the door through which she had come.

Penderel made up his mind now, and there was no time to be lost. He threw himself at Morgan, who went rolling back with the other two still clinging to him. 'Can you do that?' he cried to them, as he pushed at the struggling giant. 'Shall I knock him on the head?'

'We'll manage,' Philip gasped. They were now near the door, which Miss Femm had flung wide open. A tremendous heave of Morgan's right arm sent Philip flying back, but he quickly recovered himself and sent his fist, with all his weight behind it, crashing into Morgan's face. The man spun round, sending Sir William, pale now and dripping with sweat but still game, banging into the doorway. Philip grabbed at the loose arm and savagely twisted it behind its owner's back, at the same time charging forward. 'Rush him down the corridor,' he cried to Sir William. They disappeared through the doorway, into the dark.

Miss Femm stood there, holding the door wit one hand and her lighted candle held high in th other. 'Come on, you,' she screeched at Margar and Gladys. 'In here with me.'

Margaret, who had faltered forward, looked her with horror and could not find her voice.

'No, no!' Gladys cried, looking from her Penderel.

Miss Femm stepped back. 'Then stay ther Sluts!' she yelled. She banged the door behin her and they heard her lock it.

Margaret ran forward, crying, 'She's locked i And Philip's there, Philip!' Her hands wer fumbling at the door now.

'It's done now. Come away.' Penderel was her side, though his eyes were on Gladys.

'But Philip's in there, with that man,' she crie again. Then she turned on him, with a flash scorn: 'And what are you going to do?'

'I'm going to wait here—for the other man he told them very quietly.

Gladys was clutching his arm. 'No, no, yo can't. Come away.'

'Listen, there's no time to waste,' he said, and he spoke he hustled them across the room. 'I mu wait here until they've got Morgan safely tucke away. He may be down any moment. And you'v got to be out of the way.'

'I'll stay,' Gladys cried, chokingly.

'You can't, my dear,' he told her. 'And we must hurry.'

They were at the other side of the room now. 'But where can we go?' Margaret was asking, looking at him piteously.

'In there.' He pointed to the door that he had opened before, when he had been changing his clothes. He remembered that there was a key on the inside. Now he ran forward, took it out, and then swept them in, Margaret first. For one brief moment his arm was round Gladys. 'Sorry there's no light for you. Yes, there is, though.' He rushed away and then returned carrying the candle that Philip had had, now guttering sadly, and thrust it into Gladys's hand. 'You'll be all right in there.' His eyes dwelt on her face as if he was trying to remember it for ever. 'Quite all right. Cheerio!'

Before they could do or say anything more he had closed the door and locked them in, leaving the key in the lock. If he left them free to rush out, anything might happen. He walked very slowly and quietly back into the middle of the hall, looking up at the stairs and listening.

Chapter Thirteen

TIME stood still for Penderel, waiting there in the hall. A few moments before, when he had been hustling the women across to that room, it had seemed as if there wasn't a second to waste, but now as he listened in loneliness between those locked doors, he found there was time enough and to spare. No sound came from above. He crossed over to the door through which Morgan and Waverton and Sir William had disappeared in a struggling mass, and he tried the handle. It was locked of course; he knew very well it was. That meant that Waverton and Sir William would first have to dispose of Morgan and then get the key from the Femm woman, before they could join him. And Morgan might easily be a match for both of them for some time yet. He listened at the door. Vague distant sounds came through, suggesting that Morgan had not yet been overpowered but was still putting up a fight somewhere at the end of the corridor, perhaps in or near the kitchen. A creak from the stairs sent him back into the middle o

he hall, with his heart-beats filling his ears. But obody was there.

If that had been the moment for action, he felt, ll would have been well. There was, however, othing to do but wait, listen to the mocking old imbers and wait, stare at the jumping shadows and vait; and now he suddenly felt sick and afraid. He vanted to run away, to take the good the night had rought him, out of its darkness, and hurry with it nto safety. But he could not take it away, for if e went now, hiding his head, it would not go vith him: all would be lost. Well, he had wanted omething to do, and here was something to do. He hadn't had to wait long, he told himself grimly. How queer it was that there was something inside ou that could relish, grinning with irony, the most amnable situation you found yourself in, pointing ut how damnable it was! He'd discovered that n France, when, as now, something in him was fraid and something else wasn't, something shook nd something grinned. Some of the old faces ame popping up, smiled, and were gone; fellows e thought he'd forgotten; a spectral parade; and e wanted to keep one steadily before him so that e could cry 'It's a good war' and once again hear call back to him, just one of the daft old slogans: Jam for the troops, mate.' He would feel better

after that. He might give Gladys a shout. She'd understand. But no, that wouldn't do.

His eye went travelling idly up the dimly lighted stairs, waiting for madness to creep down from the dark, and then suddenly his mind cleared. His place wasn't here, dithering and dreaming, but at the top of those stairs. Once down here, the madman might easily escape him and let hell loose, unless of course the other two came back before he arrived. So long as there wasn't another way down, the best place for him was obviously at the top there; and even if there should be another way down, he wouldn't be much worse off up there, because it wouldn't take him long to get back again. And the sooner he went up the better.

He walked forward, then stopped and looked round hesitantly. His hand went to his forehead which was cold and wet. Wasn't there something he could take with him, something to grip? Well there was a poker, and that was better than nothing. Hastily he seized it, and was crossing to the foot of the stairs when he bethought himself of the light. He couldn't take it with him, that would be too dangerous; but if he put the lamp somewhere near the front door it would throw a little more light on the place where he would have to take his stand, at the very top of the stairs.

He crept up, slowly, shakily, his shadow leaping

nd sprawling before him. There were little noises verywhere now, not a stair in the house without its reak. All that part of the house that yawned bove him seemed tense, expectant. The little atch of darkness at the top was thick and crawling vith unrevealed terrors. A step or two more and ut of that blackness would spring a white, gibbering face. He'd had a dream like that once—it all ame back to him, raw and palpitating, the whole xperience, almost between one stair and the next—nd he remembered how he had wakened, a little oy sobbing in the night to find his mother bending ver him. Who would bend over him now? Why adn't they turned God into this vast maternal presnce, smooth hands and a murmuring voice and a amiliar lovely smell in the dark?

He was standing at the very top now, one hand ehind him, touching the rail, the other achingly olded round the poker. While his eyes stared nto the shadows and his ears seemed to run on and earch the landing, his thoughts went sickeningly acing round. He was terribly afraid now, angry vith himself for standing there. Why shouldn't he ush downstairs, join Gladys in that room and lock he door, or plunge out into the night itself, into afety and sweet air? However, probably nothing vould happen. But then, if nothing happened, he vould be all right here. And if he went and some-

thing did happen, whether it hurt him or not, he knew that all would be over, the road missed for ever; the rest would be just breathing and eating and sleeping, with his spirit, a poor shamed ghost, returning time and again to take its stand on these stairs.

Yes, he could only stay. What was that? Surely that was somebody moving, not very far away? Why didn't Waverton and Porterhouse show themselves? But then they wouldn't, not because they didn't want to, but because it always happened like that: he might have known that he would have to be alone. He'd always been more afraid of madness than anything else—the very thought of a maniac had always filled him with terror, and when this creature had raved on the stairs he'd felt sick, as if he were being pelted with lumps of putrid flesh—and of course he'd have to come in the end to face it alone. The thing came at last, the darkness shaping itself, and immediately everybody disappeared, doors were locked all round you, and you found yourself alone with it. That noise again, much nearer this time! Yes, he was at the other end of the landing. He was coming on steadily.

'Stop!' he cried, quite involuntarily. 'Stay there, d'you hear? Don't try to get past. I've got a poker here and I shall use it.' His voice was

ridiculously hoarse and shaky, not at all commanding.

The footsteps ceased, and he found he could just see a vague outline of the madman standing there a few yards away. Undoubtedly he had stopped at the sound of a voice, but he made no reply. Penderel waited and then asked himself despairingly how he could have expected a reply. Madness wouldn't stand there bandying words with him. Nevertheless he had stopped.

'Go back and don't be a fool.' Sheer necessity compelled him to speak out again, for only the sound of his own voice kept him from running away. 'You're not coming past here. Get back at once.' It was woefully grotesque and futile perhaps, yet it raised his spirits a little.

Now there came an answering gabble from that vague shape, a gabble that seemed to end in a kind of chuckle. There was a movement, followed by a quick pattering down the landing. He was going away.

In his astonishment and relief, Penderel sank back against the banisters. Was it all over then? Had he really gone? Did it only need a command or two, however shaky, just simple courage, no matter if it was raised perilously on tip-toe, to turn aside—flicking it away—what had seemed doom itself? There came now a moment of tri-

umph, and his spirits went soaring. It seemed as if the corner were turned at last, and he had a flashing vision of life stretched widely and gloriously before him, the shining happy valley, lost for years and apparently gone for ever, a dream bitterly cast off, until this strange night brought glimpse after glimpse of it through thinning mist, and now finally swung it into full view. Now he knew what it was to be alive. He could have cried aloud with happiness.

The very next moment he was sick at heart. He heard the quick pattering again; the footsteps were hastening towards him through the darkness; and everything, even his courage, collapsed at the sound. He wanted to run headlong now, to run crying defeat and then to hide himself for ever. But one last slender cord of will, still unbroken, kept him standing there.

'Stop,' he cried again. But how feeble it sounded! He wanted to implore now and not to command.

The maniac had stopped already, however, though this time he was nearer. There burst from him a sudden yell of rage.

Penderel drew himself up and tried to control his voice. 'You can't come here, I tell you ——' he began but before he could say any more, something heavy, a chair or a small table, came flying through the air, smashing against his right arm

and ribs, sending the poker clattering below, and knocking him sideways and backwards against the banisters as it crashed into them itself. He fell down, helpless in a spinning world, dizzy and sick. His arm hurt dreadfully, seemed to be broken. Soon the creature would be trampling the life out of him. He tried to rise but it was too late, the maniac was upon him, and he received a blow in the face that sent his head back with a dreadful jolt and blinded him for a moment.

There was no fear left in him now. In an agony of effort he flung himself forward, grabbed the man's legs and put out all his strength in one great lift. Down he came, and now they were rolling about the floor, tearing at one another. Penderel found himself possessed by a tremendous fury: 'You bloody swine!' he was jerking out, 'I'll kill you.' He contrived to scramble to his feet but before he had time to do anything but pull himself up, dizzily and achingly, the other was on his feet too and renewing the attack. He was a much older man than Penderel, but he was also much bigger and heavier and seemed to be unusually powerful.

Penderel had his back against the banisters. For a minute or two, while the madman was still breathless, there was little danger. He was able to dodge or ward off the lumbering blows aimed at him. He covered himself with his left arm, for the right,

though not entirely useless, hurt him terribly every time he moved it. Indeed, all his right side ached, and whenever he took a deep breath he felt a little stab of pain there. Standing where he was, he wasn't really barring the way downstairs, though he could leap upon the man's back if he should try to go down; but it was evident now that Saul Femm —Penderel had begun to give him his name—intended to settle with him before going any further. And if he could only hold out here, he told himself, the others would be in little danger. Waverton and Porterhouse might return any minute now, and even if he was finished before they did return, he would leave Saul in no condition to deal with them. There was just a minute or two in which to think of these things.

Now Saul was completely recovered and, screaming wildly, he hurled himself upon Penderel, who heard the banisters cracking ominously behind him. He felt helpless in the man's grasp. The pressure of the banisters against the small of his back was agonising. And struggle as he might, he could not release himself. One hand was fumbling for his throat. The banisters were cracking again, and he felt himself being lifted. Desperately he drew up one leg and, hanging on with all his might drove his knee into the other man's belly, released the pressure a little, contrived to slip his leg down again,

pushed a hand up under Saul's slavering chin, and by summoning the very remnant of his strength was able to send them both tottering forward a pace, clear of the banisters. There they swayed, six inches this way and that, at close grips.

Blood and sweat ran down his face, blinding him; the pain in his side was intolerable; and he felt his strength ebbing out; but he held on, held on as if there was nothing else left in the world to do. And all the while his mind, escaping from this shameful nightmare of stench and blood and pain, went darting back to queer memories and flashing along the edge of vivid little dreams; and once more he was lying in the long cool grass near the playing-field wall, or listening to Jim and Tom Ranger outside a tent, a glimmer of starlight there, or standing under the blossom at Garthstead; and oddly mingling with these memories were thoughts that came and went like swallows, thoughts of the dusk and glitter of town at early evening, quiet pipes in the night, the loud jolly orchestra and the brightening curtain, that little place up five flights of stairs, Gladys laughing at him, brave eyes meeting his through a door suddenly opened. They were so long, so long swaying there in the dark, there was time for a whole shadow show of life.

He couldn't see at all now; he had to fight for each stabbing breath; and the blood drummed re-

lentlessly in his ears. One hand had found Saul's throat and tightened on it, but he could no longer hold his ground and fell back inch after inch until at last he seemed to be lifted off his feet. He went crashing against the banisters; something was breaking; the life was being squeezed out of him; but still he held on. Now they were clear of the banisters again, for Saul had relaxed his pressure for a moment and had been compelled to fall back a step, with Penderel still clinging to him. Saul put out all his remaining strength in one tremendous heave. I'm done, I'm done, Penderel was crying, crying through a black night of crashing, splintering woodwork and rushing air. And then there was no more pain.

Chapter Fourteen

MARGARET was trying the handle of the door. 'He's locked it,' she cried, staring at Gladys.

'I know he has.' Gladys had sunk to her knees. She put the candlestick, with its feeble, spluttering flame to the floor beside her, and stretched out a hand to the door, leaning against it. 'He's shut us in because he thought we'd be safe in here.' She spoke slowly, dully.

'I don't want to be safe, to be shut in like this.' Margaret rattled the handle uselessly. 'I want to know what's happening. I want to be with Phil—my husband.'

'Don't you see?' Gladys had roused herself and was looking up now, her eyes bright with resentment. 'He's out there, waiting for that lunatic to come down, and shoved us in here to be out of the way. You don't seem to understand what he's doing. You thought he was dodging it, didn't you? My God!'

'I did at first,' Margaret said gently. 'I'm sorry.' And as she looked down at the girl's pale face,

working queerly in that jumpy little light, she felt sorry too, sorry for her, sorry for everybody.

'As if he would!' Then her tone changed from indignation to bitterness. 'Well, I wish to God he had, wish we'd never come back. It would have to be him, of course it would be. It was just waiting for him. That's silly, I suppose. I don't care. I'm all to pieces now—and he's out there, as lonely as hell, waiting for that—that thing.'

'It'll be all right,' Margaret told her, trying to keep her voice quiet and confident. 'The others will be back soon. Then there'll be three of them.'

'That woman locked the other door,' Gladys muttered.

'They'll get the key from her when they've done with Morgan,' Margaret went on. But she was thinking how all this crazy locking of doors made it seem like a bad dream. She glanced round in the dying light and shivered. 'Where are we?'

'I don't know. What does it matter?' Gladys raised herself up and tried to listen through the door.

Margaret took up the candlestick and moved forward a few paces. She saw nothing but the dimmest shapes of furnitures, however, for the little spluttering flame gave a last jump, trembled, and then rapidly dwindled. Her spirits sank with it as the darkness closed round her. She trailed back

to the door and, when the last flicker had gone, she let the candlestick fall to the ground. 'What's happening?' She bent forward.

'Oh, I can't hear a thing,' Gladys whispered.

Together they listened at the door, and it seemed to be hours before they heard anything but their own quick breathing and heart-beats. They were lost in a pulsating darkness.

'We can't do anything but wait,' whispered Margaret at last. Somehow she daren't raise her voice above a whisper.

'I can hear him moving about now, can you?' Gladys listened again. 'Bill and your husband don't seem to have come out yet. I believe he's going upstairs.'

'Yes, he is,' Margaret told her, and could feel her trembling. There was a long pause, during which they listened again, then Margaret went on: 'I can't hear anything now. Perhaps he's waiting at the top. That's horrible, isn't it? Why doesn't Philip come back? It's awful waiting here.'

'It's worse waiting there,' cried Gladys, raising her voice now. 'With that ghastly loony creeping down. Oh, my God!' She cleared her throat. 'I expect you know what's the matter with me, or you must think I'm going mad too.'

'I feel we're all going mad to-night,' Margaret broke in, hastily. 'Everything's turned crazy and

horrible. That's the awful thing, isn't it?—that you can't trust anything, like being in a nightmare. Haven't you been feeling that?'

'Yes I have.' Gladys was at once eager and piteous. 'Didn't I tell you before? I knew, I knew. Something told me all along, and I tried to tell him but I couldn't make him understand. It was only a feeling but you know what I mean?'

'Whom did you try to tell?'

'Penderel, of course. When we were outside. That's what I was going to tell you, I mean when I said you'd know what's the matter with me—because, you see—Oh, you know—I love him. We can talk now, can't we? Yes, we went outside and sat and talked, and then I found it out, came as quick as lightning, sudden but absolutely dead certain.' Then she added, simply: 'And you know what it means. You're in love with your husband, aren't you?'

'Yes, I am.' This was neither the time nor the place, Margaret felt, for all those delicate reservations that her truthful mind had so often brought out and examined. Then she realised, in a flash, that they no longer appeared to exist. She couldn't remember what they were. And she didn't want to remember. 'I haven't always thought so,' she went on. 'But I am.'

'I knew you were,' Gladys whispered. 'I could

tell, always can. But I suppose it doesn't make you ache any more, does it?'

'I think,' said Margaret slowly, 'it's beginning to, again.'

'It's funny it's so different——' Gladys began, but then broke off. There was a crash outside. 'My God! Did you hear that? And we can't do a thing! Has that lunatic come down, do you think? Are they fighting?'

'I think they must be. It's horrible, horrible.'

'And he's there by himself. The other two haven't come back. Why don't they come?' Gladys pressed her hands together in the darkness.

'I don't know,' Margaret stammered. 'Something may have happened to them. That beast—Morgan—and Miss Femm.' Then something seemed to snap inside her. 'Oh, I can't bear it, can't bear it any longer.' Her legs crumpled like paper and she slipped down the door, sobbing.

Gladys was kneeling by her side now, with an arm about her. 'Never mind, never mind, Mrs. Waverton. It's awful, isn't it, but it'll all come right for you, you'll see. Nothing'll have happened to him. Your man can look after himself.' They clung together, while through the dark, from behind the door, came tiny vague sounds, a mysterious thud-thudding. But neither of them wanted to listen any longer. They could only wait, comfort-

ing one another, until the door was opened again, to reveal their fate. Until that moment arrived, this was all their world, and they could only cling together in the darkness and cry to one another their hope and their despair.

'It's worn me down,' said Margaret brokenly. 'You've no idea what it's been like, for me, here. One thing after another. First, Miss Femm—telling me about her sister—then touching me—and that horrible room of hers. Then Morgan—he came after me—like a beast. And Philip had to fight him, upstairs. And then that strange old man—lying so still in his bed—whispering terrible things. And now this. All going on and on. Everything strange and dark and getting queerer and darker. No end to it. Until at last you begin to feel that all the safe and clean and sane things have gone for ever. You can't hold on for ever. It's been different for you perhaps, but don't you see what I mean?'

Gladys murmured that she did and tightened her clasp. She didn't understand it all, but that didn't matter. Nothing mattered now except keeping close until that door opened.

'I hated it at first,' Margaret went on. 'But then when we were talking round the table, I liked it. And I thought Philip and I could easily find one another after that, because it seemed so easy to know

and understand people, even strangers, so easy to be happy with someone you once loved.'

'I felt that too, or something like it.' Gladys was crying very quietly. 'Oh, what am I crying for! It doesn't matter though. But—it was better than that with me. It was really beginning, see? First, listening to all of you, then talking about myself. Then talking to him out there. And being able to laugh about everything together, and knowing as well that I could do a lot for him. He was absolutely fed up, didn't care a damn about anything. And I was like that really. And then I thought, if it lasted, I wouldn't be lonely any more, wouldn't be going in at night sometimes wishing I was dead. And even if it didn't last, I'd had something, you see, something different. . . .'

Margaret had been mechanically telling herself that it was all very sudden and strange, this love affair of her companion's. But when Gladys's voice trailed away, there came, flowing up through the silence, the thought that it was not strange at all, that it was as simple and natural as the breath in their bodies. Now it seemed strange that people whose hearts were empty could meet on such a night and talk through this darkness without loving. 'I see,' she said, after a long pause. Then she added: 'You know, I didn't like you at first, but I do now.'

'I hated you,' said Gladys, very close and warm.

'But that's gone completely.' She thought for a moment. 'I don't think I hated you really. I was frightened.'

'Frightened?' As soon as the word was out, however, Margaret realised what Gladys had meant. She too, had been frightened of Penderel, alarmed by something unharnessed, mocking, anarchic in him that had called to its brother, usually safely hidden away, in Philip; and so she had decided that she detested him. And so people crept about, absurdly frightened of one another, pretending to hate, keeping it up even when they had to take shelter together in such a place as this.

'Yes, I was frightened really,' Gladys was whispering, 'of the way you walked and talked and were dressed. I felt you despised me. But now it's all right, isn't it? Aren't we women silly with one another? As if there wasn't enough——!'

There was a little silence between them, and Margaret's mind returned to the world outside. 'I can hear little noises all the time,' she said, at last. 'I feel sure something's happening there. What's that?'

It was a kind of cracking sound and they heard it repeated several times. Then it stopped and they could only catch the noises they had heard before. At last there came another crack, louder this time, and it seemed to them, as they listened,

trembling in the dark, as if something were breaking.

'What is it? What's happening?' Gladys cried. 'My God, I can't stand much more of this.' Then her voice rose to a shriek. 'Oh, what's that?'

The crash and splintering and heavy thud-thud still rang in their ears. They clung to one another in agony of apprehension. The moments passed but there came no other sound. The silence, as if heavy with doom, weighed down upon them.

'What was it?' The words came from Margaret in a hollow whisper, like ghost talking to ghost.

Gladys gave a choking little cry and Margaret felt the girl's whole body relax and droop. For a few moments she remained passive, but then suddenly she sprang up and fell on the door in a fury, battering at it with her fists and even kicking it. The next minute her strength had left her and she was in Margaret's arms, quietly sobbing. Holding her tight and murmuring over her as if she were a child, Margaret was now the comforter and immediately felt better. We're being child and grown-up in turn, she was thinking; and if we always worked like that, we could all comfort one another through anything.

Gladys was quiet now. At last she spoke, but it was only as if an odd thought here and there were

slipping into words. 'We said we'd have a little flat, somewhere high up, very little and cheap. . . . You wouldn't think that much fun, I suppose?'

'We had one once,' Margaret told her, gently, 'when we first began and we thought it fun.'

'I shouldn't have been able to do much at first, but I'd have managed. I'd have liked that. I told him so. Even the little rows would have been a kind of fun. You understand, don't you?'

Margaret found that she couldn't reply.

'There's a lot of fun in life, isn't there?' Gladys went on, very slowly, as if she were talking in her sleep. 'I've had some. But not lately. Somehow if you start missing it, you go on missing it. And it's so easy to get right off the track of it, just lose the way. We'd missed it, but we'd have found it together. I would anyhow. . . .'

'Oh, why are you talking like that?' Margaret cried. 'I can't bear it. You sound—I don't know—as if something's broken—in you, I mean.'

'I felt as if it had,' said Gladys, 'when something broke out there. You heard it.'

'No, no.' Margaret was desperate. 'That's all nonsense. Rouse yourself. We don't really know what's happened. It's only waiting here, in the dark, not knowing anything, that's wearing us down. If we give in, I don't know what will happen. We can't let these things drive us out of our senses,

beat us down. That's what they're trying to do. We won't have it, will we? Let's do something. Bang on the door again.'

'I did that,' said Gladys, dully. 'There's nobody to let us out.'

'Oh, don't say that! It sounds so horrible.' And Margaret began pounding on the door. Then she stopped herself. 'Perhaps we shouldn't, though,' she faltered. She thought of that vague, gibbering figure on the stairs. Suppose he was at the other side of the door, alone, heard them knocking and opened it. Her hands fell helplessly to her side, and once more she saw life trembling on the edge of a pit, with unreason darkening the sky above it. If Philip didn't come, it wouldn't be long before she would be absolutely beaten down and everything would be lost.

Gladys stirred. 'I thought I heard something then. Yes, there you are. Voices.'

'I can hear Philip,' Margaret broke in, jubilantly. 'I'm sure I can.' Without thinking now, she rapped on the door. Then she stopped to listen again. 'Yes, it is Philip. It's all right now. I'm sure it is.' She called out and rapped again.

'Hello!' Philip was very close now, just at the other side of the door. 'Is that you, Margaret?'

'Yes, here we are,' she called back. 'Let us out, Philip. Isn't the key there?'

'Yes it is. You're all right, aren't you?' His voice sounded queer. 'Well, wait a few minutes.'

'We can't wait. What's the matter?' But he had gone, and they were left to listen and wonder and whisper together a little longer in the darkness.

'I'm frightened, I'm frightened,' said Gladys at last, putting out a hand and coming close again.

'So am I,' replied Margaret. 'But it's really all right now, Gladys, isn't it?'

'I don't know,' she whispered. 'I don't know.'

Then they waited in silence for the door to open.

Chapter Fifteen

IT HAD seemed as if dawn were postponed for ever, yet it came at last. Philip noticed a vague trouble in the air and then a faint greying of things. He alone appeared to be awake now. He was sitting in a chair, and his arms were around Margaret, who was leaning against him, curled across another and lower chair. For some time he had been sitting there, quiet, unstirring, numbed, but with his thoughts going on and on, like a river flowing through a frozen land. He seemed to have been there a long time now. Already the events of the night had receded; the struggle with Morgan in the hall here, along the corridor, in the kitchen, and the final victory that sent him, cowed, beaten, into the cellar; the fantastic interview with Miss Femm, who would not surrender the key of the door into the hall at first and had to be stormed at; the discovery of the lifeless bodies of Penderel and Saul Femm, one with his neck broken and the other mysteriously killed, perhaps from shock and a weak heart; the huddling away of the bodies, the

scenes that followed with Margaret and Gladys and the two Femms; already these events were receding, a haze was creeping over them, though the tale was hardly three hours old.

He himself had not slept, though there was something hot and aching about his eyes and a weight upon their lids. He had been busy making Margaret comfortable, holding her securely, and now she slept. Not far away, Sir William, who had long been exhausted and had not easily recovered from the blow that Morgan had given him, was stretched out in the other armchair, dozing heavily. The rich baronet, Philip reflected, had come out of it all extraordinarily well. Brigand he might be, but he was certainly a man. He had shown courage and nerve during the fight with Morgan and later, and, what was even more surprising, he had been magnificent with Gladys afterwards, the 'lass,' as he had called her with a gruff tenderness that seemed to be part of the real North-country self he usually kept hidden away.

Philip watched the grey light steal into the room and then begin to creep towards every corner. There was Gladys, the most tragic figure among them. She was half-sitting, half-lying on the floor, with her head against Sir William's knee and one arm flung across it. She, too, was sleeping peacefully at last, completely worn out after her long

storm of sobbing. When she had first learned of Penderel's death, she had been strangely quiet; and it was only afterwards, when in spite of all they could say to dissuade her she had gone to look at his body and had suddenly flung herself down upon it, that she had lost all her self-control. And now she was asleep, and when she wakened to the world again the night's tragedy would have lost something of its stabbing power, would already be a memory, be softened, gauzed about with dream, and she would be ready to go quietly away, to complete—and how strange that seemed—her journey.

His thoughts wandered on as he watched the room tremble between darkness and light. Penderel and poor crazed Saul Femm had only seemed to be sleeping, as if suddenly weary of their long wrestling bout, when they had found them, twisted on the floor beneath the broken banisters. And there had seemed, he remembered, to be a queer brotherhood between them. You felt they were going to awaken somewhere else and immediately shake hands and talk it all out together.

Margaret stirred and his arm tightened about her, but she didn't waken. Nothing much had happened between them; they hadn't had it out in the old cool and clever way; but they had exchanged a glance or two, a few broken sentences; and it looked as if everything might be different yet. 'I'm

so lonely,' she had whispered once; and then: 'It's unbearable without love.' But that was in the last long terror of the dark, and perhaps he ought to forget it now. Still, the sun would set again, and the darkness would come again. And he had said once, when she was burying her face in his coat: 'Let's make another start'; and he had felt an answering grip upon his arm. But the real moment which might change everything for them, had been one of silence, just a clasp of hands. That was when they were standing together on the landing upstairs. Mr. Femm had come and gone like a shaking ghost; Miss Femm had departed to pray by the body of her dead brother; Gladys, growing calmer at last, had been handed over to Sir William; and it was then they had remembered old Sir Roderick upstairs, lying there wondering and helpless in the dark. Nobody could have visited him because Philip himself still had the key. Together they had returned there, haunted by a curiously poignant memory of that room, that last little outpost of sanity, and together they had crept in, carrying the remaining inch of lighted candle, to whisper the end of the story to him who had begun it for them in a whisper or two. It was a strange errand, with a conclusion stranger still. Not a sound nor a movement had come from that shadowy bed, and when they crept forward to look at the old man,

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t had seemed as if he too had died. Then they had noticed his faint breathing, the very lightest sigh of life, and had seen that he was calmly sleeping. Probably he had slept through everything. They left him undisturbed, but when they had closed the door behind them, they stood very close together, in silence, and hand had reached out for hand. Something had united them at that moment, little more than a breath perhaps, and yet it brought them so close, so close. Surely they could begin again now?

Somebody moved and grunted. That was Sir William. 'Hello!' Philip called softly. 'You awake?'

'Yes, worse luck,' Sir William replied, in a very hoarse, uncertain voice. 'Can't either sleep or keep awake. I'm sore all over. Keep thinking, too.'

'So do I,' said Philip, companionably, and then waited.

'Tell you what keeps coming into my mind,' the other went on, after a pause. 'Remember when we took hold of that poor devil, the lunatic? Well, I noticed something lying on the floor on my side, just by his coat. It was a couple of cards. I can tell you what they were. Seven of clubs and five of diamonds. I shan't ever forget 'em either. Seven of clubs and five of diamonds. And then some more came tumbling out of his pocket when

we lifted the body. He'd a pack in his pocket. Must have played patience up there some times, poor devil. That got me somehow. Don't know how it is, but can't forget those cards.'

Philip made a little answering noise that showed he was listening, but said nothing. He hoped Sir William would go on talking, but he didn't much want to talk himself. There was silence for a few minutes.

'I liked that lad Penderel, you know,' Sir William remarked at last, as if musing aloud. 'He wasn't my sort and I don't suppose he liked me, but I liked him. I'd have done something for him too. He was going to get a job, you know. About the last thing he talked about.'

'What was he going to do?' Philip found he could talk about Penderel quite calmly now.

'God knows! He probably wouldn't have done it long, whatever it was. He'd got guts all right—we know that—and I fancy he'd brains, but I don't see him fitting in anywhere, I mean I didn't see him. You never know, of course, you never know. But this is no way to talk about the poor lad, is it? I liked him, liked him from the first, when he was talking about himself. I thought it seemed damned unfair, somehow. I dunno. What can you do? And it seems a damned sight worse now. Won't bear thinking about, will it? Gladys here's sleeping

like a three-year-old now. Well, I'll see she's all right. Made up my mind about that.'

Then Sir William struggled with a series of yawns. 'Nearly dead for want of sleep,' he confessed. 'How about you? But then you're still young. I'm getting on, and if I didn't know it before, I know it now.' He yawned again. 'There'll be something to do about this business. Just thought of that. Inquests and God knows what else, keeping us dodging about for days. Damned nuisance, eh? Lots to do to-morrow—to-day I mean—if we're not still cut off. Well, we'll have to get busy. But must have some sleep first.' His voice sank to a mere grunt and in another minute he had dozed off again.

Daylight itself was at the windows, suddenly chilling the place. Philip shivered a little, feeling cold now and very hungry. The arm that held Margaret was cramped and aching and very gently he tried to move it. She stirred, turned her head, and he saw that her eyes were wide open though still vague with sleep. Something caught at his heart as he stared down at her face, for she looked different, at once dreamy and curiously fragile, yet he remembered her looking like that once before. Was it when Betty was born?

For some little time she remained like that, and neither stirred again nor spoke. He leaned for-

ward and watched her eyes clear themselves of sleep and then slowly move this way and that, up to his face, towards the windows. 'It's nearly daylight,' she said at last, very softly.

'Yes, it's dawn,' he told her. 'I've been watching it arrive.' He saw her eyes close again and waited a moment. Then he added: 'It's been a long time coming.'

Her only reply was a little murmuring sound from her closed lips. It seemed as if she were falling asleep again. The next moment, however, her eyes were wide open once more and looked up at him. 'You've not been asleep, Phil, have you?' she said.

'Not yet. I suppose I've been thinking in a numbed sort of fashion. I must say I'm tired.'

'You look tired,' she whispered. 'Try to go to sleep. Don't bother about anything any more.' Her eyes closed again, but she raised her head a little and he bent forward and kissed her, very gently.

Now holding her lightly at arms' length, he half raised himself from the chair and gingerly tried his legs. 'I'm horribly cramped,' he said softly. 'You must be too. Try this big chair while I work this stiffness off.' She nodded, and he moved to one side and helped her into the armchair.

'Is Gladys asleep?' she whispered.

'Yes, she's never moved.'

'I'm glad. We mustn't waken her.' She sank back and he bent over her and seemed to see her eyes cloud over with sleep again.

'I think I'll go over to the window,' he remarked, 'just to see what it's like outside.'

She looked at him and tried to smile. 'It's different now, isn't it?' she whispered, and saw him nod and then creep away. Vaguely she thought how it had seemed once as if it would never be daylight again, as if it would just go on getting darker and darker, more and more horrible, as if she too would soon be lost in madness. Then, she couldn't have imagined the daylight coming into the house. But it hadn't, not into that house. This was a different house.

She was very tired and sleepy, and she had to sink down and close her eyes again. But her mind went groping about and at last stumbled back through the night. It seemed different now; something had vanished from it; that huge background of nightmare, horror mounting in the dark, all that had gone. They had come running out of the rain, the black night, into this house, clamouring for shelter, and had found here some people like themselves, only twisted, crazed, with loneliness, age, some weakness of blood or brain. Their figures came swaying before her and now for a moment

she could look into each face steadily and pitifully. Last night she had been sick, terrified, despairing; to-morrow, looking back, she might be angry; but just now she could only be sorry. She thought of the five of them coming in here, saw them a long way off, dim little figures, and then vaguely tried to remember the talk they had had, what they had said. She heard Penderel's voice again. Something about a snag, the great snag. Had he got round it now, leaped over it, gone on his way? But what was it? About being taken in or being piggy, was that it? She could remember thinking it all rather young and silly and that's all she could remember, she was so sleepy, just sorry and very sleepy.

The window showed Philip no red flares and rising ball of fire, no sudden triumph of day. It was a chill misty dawn, a landscape in smoke and steel. It held out no large promises of sunlight and the blue; yet there was a touch of kindness in its level sober light, which moved so slowly in that room to which he turned now, and dealt so gently with the eyes it found there. The morning's truth would not be proclaimed with insolent haste. It would be revealed very slowly and quietly.

As he passed, he heard a sudden little noise from Sir William, who was apparently clearing his throat.

Philip stopped and turned, and saw that he was awake again. He tip-toed nearer, glancing down at Gladys, who was still in the same position, sleeping soundly. The hand above her grasped a handkerchief, tiny and crumpled. She looked like a child. Sir William looked different too in this new light, looked curiously aged, stony, desolate.

'Saw you looking out,' he told Philip in a hoarse whisper. 'What's it like?'

'The floods have gone down, I think,' Philip replied very softly. 'It's not too bad a morning.'

Sir William grunted. 'It's got plenty of time yet. Wish I could sleep.'

'I'm going to try now,' said Philip, and crept away. The next moment he was lying on the floor by the side of Margaret's chair.

'Your wife asleep?' The question came faintly.

'Yes,' he whispered, 'fast asleep.'